

LEISURE SATISFACTION OF SPORT TOURISTS WITH COLLEGIATE SPORTING EVENTS AND RELATED LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was (1) to examine the frequency of travel of respondents on an overnight trip to participating in a sports event, (2) to identify whether or not they participate in local attractions and the satisfaction levels of local attractions during the sport event and (3) to determine the effect of sport event tourism involvement and experience of local attractions on leisure satisfaction of participants by utilising the mean of the Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS) short form. A total of 108 participants (male=59; female=49) responded to an onsite survey near a stadium in a regional public four-year university located in the southwest region of the USA. Convenience sampling was utilised for the better understanding of fan tourists' experience of sports event participation, local attractions and their leisure satisfaction. The results revealed that the experience and satisfaction of local attractions had a statistically significant difference in aesthetic leisure satisfaction among six subscales of the LSS. The findings should be considered by practitioners in the development of strategies to attract more participants based on the results of leisure satisfaction levels through sport event tourism.

Keywords: Aesthetic satisfaction; Collegiate sports; Leisure Satisfaction Scale; Local attractions; Sport event tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Sports tourism is defined as leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to play in a sport, watch physical activities, or visit attractions associated with the sport (Gibson, 1998:108). Sports tourism is a relatively new field of academic studies, but travelling to participate in a sport or watch a sporting event is not at all a new activity (Gibson, 2005).

The tourism industry has recognised an increased interest in sports tourism since the mid-1990s (Ross, 2001; Gibson, 2005). According to the Kearney global management consulting firm (Collignon & Sultan, 2014), the sport event industry was worth 80 billion dollars in 2014. It was expected to grow by 7% annually worldwide. The pace of this growth is faster than that of the global gross domestic product (GDP). In North America (specifically, the United States), sports revenue has increased 1.6 times faster than the North American GDP (Collignon & Sultan, 2014). Spectators alone contribute 28 billion dollars to the sports industry, such as

watching sport events at the stadium. Consumers in the United States are likely to spend almost 17 billion dollars a year to purchase tickets for sporting events (Plunkett, 2008).

Schumacher (2015) reported through the National Association of Sports Commissions that approximately 26 million sports tourists spent 8.96 billion dollars in 2014, an increase of 3% compared with the previous year. Nearly every large city in North America has some sports tourism initiatives with personnel and agencies dedicated to attracting tourists (Getz, 2008).

Collegiate sport event tourism

Sport event tourists have many different favourite venues. Some fans travel to watch hallmark events, such as the Olympic Games, World Cup soccer championships and professional sports games (Ross, 2001; Gibson *et al.*, 2003). Sports sponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), including football, basketball and baseball, and their associated championship tournaments, are destinations for other spectators (Ross, 2001; Dixon *et al.*, 2013). The number of spectators at collegiate amateur sport events has increased dramatically in recent years. According to the NCAA (2019), over 42.5 million fans attended NCAA Division I football games during the 2018–2019 season. That is an increase of more than 6.5 million from the 2004–2005 season.

If this dramatic growth continues, as it is likely to do, travelling to a collegiate sporting event is likely to be a more frequent and significant leisure activity for enthusiasts. The Travel Industry Association of America has stated that two-fifths of U.S. adults travel to organised sports events, competitions, or tournaments as either spectators or participants (Ross, 2001). Of sports tourists, 84% are spectators who watch professional and amateur sport events equally while travelling (Ross, 2001).

Studies of college sports tourism and the fans of these activities have attracted attention in recent decades (Irwin & Sandler, 1998; Gibson *et al.*, 2003; Gibson, 2005). Irwin and Sandler (1998) focused on the tourism-related potential of fans who watch college sports events. Gibson *et al.* (2003) concentrated their investigation on the tourism-related behaviours of college sports fans and found that they spent time attending games, watching sports on television and following newspaper and internet articles on sports. College sports fans were likely to attend all of the home games of a football team they followed and also engage in traditional tourist behaviours while attending away games of the team.

Studies of local community attractions for college sports fans have also been a topic of interest to researchers (Irwin & Sandler, 1998; DeSchrive & Jensen, 2002; Dixon *et al.*, 2013). For example, Garnham (1996) and Higham (1999) found that the travellers' awareness of the community they were visiting increased. College sports events were likely to increase city revenues and bolster the community spirit. Irwin and Sandler (1998) studied the travel planning and expenditure patterns of college sports tourists. They found that fans with a particular team affiliation spent more time and money at sites where their college's teams were playing. DeSchrive and Jensen (2002) found that the spectator attendance at college football games was significantly affected by certain determinants, including promotional activities and market competition. Dixon *et al.* (2013) found that fans who attended sport events could significantly be beneficial to local businesses and a community as a whole.

Sport, tourism and leisure

In the academic field of sport, tourism and leisure, the definition of *leisure* is essential (Hinch *et al.*, 2005). Three essential elements define leisure: (1) the perceived freedom experienced by

exercising one's free will; (2) the autotelic activity experienced through one's intrinsic self-motivation; and (3) the beneficial outcome of the event (Cordes & Ibrahim, 2003). *Sport* is defined as a physical activity that is structured, goal-oriented, competitive and contest-based (McPherson *et al.*, 1989). A spectator's consumption of a sporting event can be categorised as a form of leisure (Hinch *et al.*, 2005). *Tourism* can be defined as the activities of a person who travels to and stays in destinations outside of the person's natural environment to pursue leisure, business, or other activities (Smith, 2014). Figure 1 depicts how sport, tourism and leisure can be intertwined.

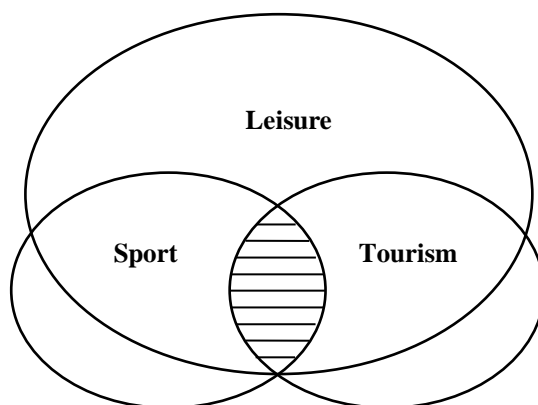


Figure 1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEISURE, SPORT AND TOURISM

Adapted from Hinch *et al.*, 2005.

Leisure satisfaction

Leisure satisfaction is one of the primary variables involved in an individual's choice of recreational activities (Searle *et al.*, 1993). Beard and Ragheb (1980:22) defined leisure satisfaction as: "The positive perceptions or feelings which an individual forms, elicits, or gains as a result of engaging in leisure activities and choices". It is essential to understand that the overall satisfaction gained from leisure experiences influences an individual's intentions to continue or forego participation in leisure activities and make further choices (Petrick & Backman, 2001; Beggs & Elkman 2010). Another source also examined participants' abilities or inabilities to meet their needs and are associated with the level of positive satisfaction derived from general leisure experiences (Lapa, 2013). In sports tourism, the satisfaction that tourists gain from their leisure experiences is an aspect deserving investigation.

The literature has indicated various approaches to measuring levels of satisfaction of travellers (Neal *et al.*, 1999; Petrick & Backman, 2001; Correia *et al.*, 2013). Neal *et al.* (1999) developed a measure of satisfaction with leisure tourism by utilising a theory-based quality-of-life satisfaction model. Specifically, they measured the services that tourists received by asking questions related to their satisfaction with the quality of travel industry professionals and the quality and cost of services received at the destination. The questions elicited the respondents' general feelings about a vacation trip in terms of their satisfaction with leisure tourism (Neal *et al.*, 1999). Petrick and Backman (2001) estimated overall levels of satisfaction of golf travellers by asking four attribute questions and two information questions.

Collegiate sports event tourism has become a topic that has received much attention among scholars (Gibson, 2005). However, there has been limited research on this topic in terms of the satisfaction level of sports tourists. It can be helpful to use the Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS) to understand why fans travel to watch college sports events. This scale "provides the extent to which individuals perceive that certain personal needs are met or satisfied through their leisure activities" (Beard & Ragheb, 1980:22).

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was: (1) to determine how often respondents travel and stay overnight to participate as sport event tourists; (2) to examine the satisfaction levels of sports event tourists in terms of participation and local attractions; and (3) to identify the effect of the tourists' involvement in sport events and their experience of local attractions as a form of leisure satisfaction. This study was done by utilising the LSS short form.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were surveyed at a stadium at a regional public 4-year university located in the southwest region of the United States. All participants were adults aged 18 years and older who had travelled from another place to watch a collegiate sports event and had stayed overnight in the area. College students were excluded from the study because many of them lived on campus. One hundred and ten adults responded to the survey, but two responses were eliminated because they were incomplete. Therefore, a total of 108 surveys (49 females and 59 males) were utilised for the analysis of the respondents' leisure satisfaction.

Procedures

A convenience sample was utilised to better understand the tourists' leisure satisfaction with their experiences of sport event participation and local attractions. Participants were recruited at the site of a collegiate sport event on the previous evening and all days of game day and given a handout survey by the authors of the current study.

Research instrument

The survey addressed sports tourism participation and visits to local attractions employing the LSS short form, developed by Beard and Ragheb (1980), and demographic information was collected. Participants were asked how frequently they participated in sports tourism each year, what their experiences had been like when visiting local attractions, and what their satisfaction levels were with the attractions. The LSS had 24 items, and answers were rated by applying a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree). The six components of leisure satisfaction in the LSS are: (1) psychological, (2) educational, (3) social, (4) relaxation, (5) physiological, and (6) aesthetic. The final score is calculated by adding the scores for all 24 items and dividing the number by 24 to determine the mean (Beard & Ragheb, 1980). Cronbach's alpha coefficient confirmed the reliability of the 24 items and six subscales. For the six subscales, the reliability was: 0.76 for psychological; 0.84 educational; 0.73 for social; 0.82 for relaxation; 0.78 for physiological; and 0.86 for aesthetic.

The reliability of the 24 items was high at 0.928. Beard and Ragheb (1980) had confirmed the validity of the LSS short form and its suitability for use in the field of leisure and recreation.

Ethical considerations

All participants were informed by the researchers that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be anonymous before they answered the survey. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the higher education institution of the researchers (ED15164) approved the process of this study.

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences 20 (SPSS 20) was utilised to calculate the reliability of the 24 LSS items and six subscales, the demographics of survey participants, and the mean and standard deviation of sports event tourism participation and experience of and satisfaction levels with local attractions. Due to convenience sampling, the Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric procedure was used to examine the relationship between sports event tourism participation, interest in local attractions, and leisure satisfaction scores on the LSS.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics related to responses about the frequency of participation in sports tourism and the experience of and satisfaction levels of visits to local attractions.

Table 1. FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS EVENT TOURISM AND SATISFACTION LEVELS OF LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

Question	Response	n	%
On average, how many times per year do you travel on a trip overnight to watch a sport event?	1	8	7.4
	2	35	32.4
	3	26	24.1
	4	17	15.7
	5	5	4.6
	6	4	3.7
	7	3	2.8
	8	4	3.7
	9	0	0
	10	6	5.6
In general, how would you rate local attractions?	Not Available	16	14.8
	Strongly dissatisfied	2	1.9
	Dissatisfied	1	0.9
	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	14	13.0
	Satisfied	41	38.0
	Strongly satisfied	34	31.5
Total		108	100.0

The results indicated that 72.2% of respondents participated in sports event tourism two to four times per year. More specifically, 32.4% of respondents participated in sport events travel two times per year, 24.1% three times per year and 15.7% four times per year. A small percentage, 14.8%, did not experience local attractions. Approximately 70% of the respondents were satisfied or strongly satisfied with their experiences of local attractions. Only 2.8% were dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with local attractions.

The mean of the LSS short form score was calculated to determine how satisfied respondents were with their sports event tourism participation (Table 2). Of the 24 items, the one with the highest mean score was, "My leisure activities of sports event tourism provide opportunities to try new things". The next highest mean score was found with the statements "My leisure activities of sports event tourism are very interesting to me" and "The areas or places where I engage [in] my leisure activities of sports event tourism are interesting". The satisfaction level for all six subscales was higher than the average mean scores. The subscales social, aesthetic and relaxation had the highest mean scores of the LSS.

Table 2. MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF LEISURE SATISFACTION SCALE (LSS)

Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS)	M±SD
Psychological	3.59±0.717
My leisure activities of sports event tourism are very interesting to me	4.17±0.881
My leisure activities of sports event tourism give me self-confidence	3.24±0.965
My leisure activities of sports event tourism give me a sense of accomplishment	3.51±1.009
I use many different skills and abilities in my leisure activities of sports event tourism	3.43±0.912
Educational	3.83±0.774
My leisure activities of sports event tourism increase my knowledge about things around me	4.01±0.962
My leisure activities of sports event tourism provide opportunities to try new things	4.21±0.809
My leisure activities of sports event tourism help me to learn about myself	3.24±1.013
My leisure activities of sports event tourism help me to learn about other people	3.86±0.961
Social	3.95±0.616
I have social interaction with others through leisure activities of sports event tourism	4.04±0.699
My leisure activities of sports event tourism have helped me to develop a close relationship with others	3.83±0.942
The people I meet in my leisure activities of sports event tourism are friendly	4.04±0.764
I associated with people in my free time who enjoy doing leisure activities of sports event tourism a great deal	3.87±0.848
Relaxation	3.94±0.788
My leisure activities of sports event tourism help me to relax	3.94±0.984
My leisure activities of sports event tourism help relieve stress	3.89±1.079
My leisure activities of sports event tourism contribute to my emotional well being	3.86±1.000
I engage in leisure activities of sports event tourism simply because I like doing them	4.07±0.839

Continued

Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS)	M±SD
Physiological	3.01±0.850
My leisure activities of sports event tourism are physically challenging	2.82±1.142
I do leisure activities of sports event tourism which develop my physical fitness	2.92±1.108
I do leisure activities of sports event tourism which restore me physically	2.99±1.056
My leisure activities of sports event tourism help me to stay healthy	3.28±1.092
Aesthetic	3.95±0.702
The areas or places where I engage my leisure activities of sports event tourism are fresh and clean	3.85±0.852
The areas or places where I engage my leisure activities of sports event tourism are interesting	4.16±0.726
The areas or places where I engage my leisure activities of sports event tourism are beautiful	3.89±0.931
The areas or places where I engage my leisure activities of sports event tourism well designed	3.91±0.838

Note: Participants were asked to rate each leisure satisfaction item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from: 1=strongly disagree to 3=neutral to 5=strongly agree. M=Mean SD=Standard deviation

The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to identify the effect of sports event tourism participation and satisfaction with local attractions. The results showed that the experience of and satisfaction with local attractions had a statistically significant difference in the aesthetic subscale of the LSS (Table 3). However, there was not a significant difference in the six subscales of leisure satisfaction for the frequency of sports event tourism.

Table 3. SPORTS EVENT TOURISM PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION WITH LOCAL ATTRACTIONS ON SUBSCALES OF LSS

Subscales of Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS)	Sports event tourism participation		Experience/satisfaction of local attractions	
	Chi-Square	p-value	Chi-Square	p-value
Psychological	5.447	0.709	6.808	0.235
Educational	2.659	0.954	9.505	0.091
Social	2.926	0.939	4.200	0.521
Relaxation	4.790	0.780	8.316	0.140
Physiological	15.508	0.050	3.521	0.620
Aesthetic	9.605	0.294	19.179	0.002

DISCUSSION

The current study was set up to determine the participation in sports event tourism and the satisfaction levels of sports event tourism participation and visits to local attractions. Another goal was to identify how involvement in sports event tourism and local attractions affected the levels of leisure satisfaction of participants. Results indicated that the majority of the respondents had travelled two to four times per year to participate in collegiate sports event tourism. This study is supported by another study that found that 72% of respondents participated in some form of sports tourism four times yearly or more (Snipes & Ingram, 2007).

As the analysis in Table 2 revealed, participants were not dissatisfied with their leisure activities according to all six subscales of the LSS. The lowest mean score on the subscale was for physiological leisure satisfaction, but the score was nonetheless above 3 (neutral). This result could be understandable because most participants who took the survey were spectators at a sport event and were not attending it in order to fulfil their physical obligations or challenges. They were also drinking and eating at the time rather than engaging in physical activity. Their connection to the event and the study would explain why physiological satisfaction had the lowest mean score of all the LSS subscales, including the lowest score, compared to the other subscales, for the reasoning behind participation in sports event tourism. The previous study also supports the current finding that tourists had higher satisfaction levels on additional health, spa and wellness services than participation on sports activities (Markus *et al.*, 2019).

The respondents' scores for their leisure satisfaction in terms of psychological and educational benefits were the next two lowest, but they were still above average; indeed, the scores were quite high. Crompton (1979) suggested that an individual may select the tourism experience for the psychological factors of social interaction, development of relationships, escape from the mundane, chance for exploration, raising of personal stature and relief from regression. Psychological factors, such as personal rewards and escape from the mundane were seen as strong motivators toward tourism and satisfaction by Šimková and Holzner (2014). According to Park and Yoon (2009), the importance of education in the leisure satisfaction of sports tourism aligns with six dimensions of motivation for rural tourism. Although some educational opportunities were available in towns, they were not seen as sources of major educational benefits. By travelling to an event at a university, a tourist can visit museums of art, sports, history and culture.

Previous studies suggested that relaxation and the social aspects of tourism could be factors in motivating tourism. This might explain why the relaxation subscale had a higher mean score ($M=3.94$) (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003; Park & Yoon, 2009). The social aspects of the LSS had one of the highest mean scores. This finding supports the theory that the social aspects of tourism, such as being in a fun community and interacting with friends, were essential factors in tourism motivation. Several researchers found that satisfaction arose from taking part in social experiences (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003; Correia *et al.*, 2013; Yoshida *et al.*, 2013).

As shown in Tables 2 and Table 3, this study found that aesthetics had the highest mean score of leisure satisfaction. The experience of and satisfaction with local attractions significantly influenced aesthetic leisure satisfaction. Previous research also supported that the aesthetic environment, such as the quality and cleanliness of the sports facility, was one of the main reasons for continued participation in sport events (Yoshida *et al.*, 2013; Lee & Kim, 2014). The research by Gibson *et al.* (2003) indicated that the town where the sport events were held was one of the main reasons to visit and that decent restaurants and local shopping opportunities affected satisfaction.

Another study by Yuksel *et al.* (2010) suggested that customer satisfaction can be affected by the level of place attachment to a tourist location. It could explain the overall high satisfaction level with the overall leisure experience of a sports tourism event. The expressed attachment a participant may have to a sports team may result in a higher level of motivation for participating in sporting events. It can be suggested that the motivation to experience leisure can be a factor in leisure satisfaction (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991).

The results offer meaningful information on the leisure satisfaction of sports event tourism and local attractions, but some limitations must be acknowledged. One of the primary

limitations is the low numbers of the sample with the use of convenience sampling methods that might have restrictions on making generalised conclusions. On the day of the survey, the weather was also a factor. The temperature dropped significantly, and rain began falling during the game. The weather might have affected respondents and limited the collection of data. Another concern is that the survey was completed in only one region, the southwestern United States, and this might affect the generalisability of the results.

Several surveys have attempted to determine the satisfaction level of multiple tourist experiences (Neal *et al.*, 1999; Petrick & Backman, 2001; Correia *et al.*, 2013). Utilising the LSS has opened the opportunity to look at participation from a leisure satisfaction perspective rather than a tourist satisfaction perspective. This method provides an understanding of how one is satisfied with an experience from a different viewpoint. Using other satisfaction instruments to measure aspects of sports event tourism may be needed. It is also suggested that researchers could use the LSS for different sports tourism events to assist in further generalising the findings on the leisure satisfaction of sports tourism and the amenities offered to tourists.

CONCLUSION

The overall conclusion of the study is that individuals who attend sport games as spectators obtained the highest level of significant leisure satisfaction from the aesthetics aspect of the tourist experience and its amenities. The subscales of the psychological, educational, social and relaxation aspects had reasonably high mean scores, but they were not significant. The findings from this study should be considered by practitioners or professionals who develop strategies to attract tourists to sport events. The leisure satisfaction levels of sport event tourism can be helpful for those who organise sport events and might lead them to form partnerships with purveyors of local attractions. Also, they would be able to provide more satisfaction for tourists, and this might result in revisiting of sport events.

Practitioners and professionals should also be aware that the social aspects of participation in sport events are essential for tourists. Based on the findings, one can see that it can be beneficial to provide marketing events in which participants can get together quickly and have more opportunities for social interaction. Also, it might be beneficial for sport event providers to partner with local businesses to work on aspects of sport event tourism that did not have high scores for leisure satisfaction in our study.

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