

# Senior Games as Serious Sport Tourism

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*Stebbins (1992) defined serious leisure as the systematic pursuit of amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is substantial and interesting for the participants involved. This study investigated associations between serious leisure and sport tourism using Indiana Senior Games participants. This study used a self-report questionnaire to assess if indicators of sport tourism discriminate between high and low serious leisure participants (N = 218). Discriminant function analysis was used to discriminate group differences between high and low serious leisure participants. Miles travelled, number of people in the group, and amount of training were the most important discriminating variables for serious leisure.*

## Introduction

Sport tourism, a type of special interest tourism, is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global travel and tourism industry. A Sports Business (2004) industry report valued the 2003 sports tourism to be in excess of \$51 billion. Gibson (1998) defined active sport tourism as involving people who travel in order to participate in sporting events. An example of active sport tourism may be participation in state or national level Senior Games, for individuals 50 and older. This means that thousands of participants, volunteers, supporters and spectators will expense domestic travel and tourism dollars. The 2009 National Senior Games was held in San Francisco, and the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau estimated that the economic impact of the National Senior Games is expected to exceed \$35 million (Bay Area Sport Organizing Committee, 2008). The Administration on Ageing (October 2008) reported that the proportion of the older population — 65 and older — is projected to increase from 12.4% in 2000 to 20% in 2030. Similar to world population trends, Americans enjoy increased lifespan and the growing proportion of older adults will impact societal resources, such increased healthcare costs or increase in senior travel demand. Hence, research on senior citizens' participation in sport tourism becomes more important from a societal and financial impact standpoint. Every state in the U.S. hosts senior athletic events annually, and these events are dedicated to encouraging senior citizens to lead a healthy lifestyle. Research shows that participating in athletic events provides both personal and social benefits among senior citizens. For example, Siegenthaler and O'Dell (2003) studied older golfers and found that playing golf

contributed to successful aging in terms of cognitive and physical function. Smith and Storandt (1997) studied older adults who competed at different levels of intensities and reported muscle gain and socialization, as some of the perceived benefits.

The behavior of older adults participating in Senior Games can be understood using Stebbins' (1992) serious leisure concept. Serious leisure is characterized as the systematic pursuit of amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that is substantial and interesting for the participants involved. It provides a sense of belonging through membership, or identification of self through activities and with a group of participants with distinct values and beliefs. Serious leisure also expands participant's social circle, fosters responsibility and creates the opportunity to feel valued and needed by other members. The concept of serious leisure has been examined in a variety of leisure related studies involving runners (Shipway & Jones, 2008), shag dancers (Brown, 2007), older golfers (Siegenthaler & O'Dell, 2003), people with disabilities (Patterson, 2000), volunteers (Stamer, Lerdall, & Chao, 2008), football fans (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002), and tourists (Kane & Zink, 2004). Green and Jones (2005) investigated the concept of serious leisure and sport tourism and coined the term serious sport tourism. They suggested that serious leisure is an appropriate framework to explain sport tourism, and the two concepts are mutually reinforcing activities. Green and Jones also identified participant benefits such as identity construction, subcultural interaction, valued identity, and career development. Taken together, serious leisure and involvement in sport tourism have been recognized as important aspects of understanding behavior of older adults. While there has been increasing number of researches in sport tourism, few studies however have investigated the involvement in sport tourism and how that relates to serious leisure. Thus, this study sought to examine the relationships of serious leisure and sport tourism using Senior Games participants. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine if sport tourism indicators (i.e., training hours per week, miles traveled, money spent, years participated, and number of people in the party) discriminate between high and low serious leisure participants.

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Submitted: 05/13/2009

Accepted: 09/21/2009

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**Methodology**

*Respondents*

The sample for this study was athletes participating in the 2008 Indiana Senior Games. To qualify as a Senior Games participant, individuals must be over 50 years of age. Approximately 600 seniors, primarily from Indiana and other Midwest cities, participated in the 2008 Indiana Senior Games held in central Indiana. The games consisted of a four-day event that gave older adults the opportunity to participate in 15 competitive sports which included archery, badminton, basketball, golf, horseshoes, swimming, tennis, track and field events, and etc. Two new sports, mountain biking and pickleball, were introduced as demonstration sports. The investigators first mailed the survey instrument to potential participants along with the registration packet. A total of 125 surveys were returned by mail. Additionally, the investigators intercepted participants at the event registration area and individuals that did not complete the initial survey were asked to complete a survey. One hundred thirty five surveys were collected during event registration. The researchers collected a total of 260 surveys and 218 of them were used in data analysis. Forty two surveys were discarded because they were incomplete.

Instrumentation

*Serious leisure.* The dependent variable was level of serious leisure participation and 2 group memberships were designated. Serious leisure was measured using the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (Gould, Moore, McGuire, & Stebbins, 2008). It is a 54 item questionnaire that measures six qualities of serious leisure: perseverance, career development, effort, personal and social benefits, unique ethos, and identity. Cronbach's alpha for serious leisure items was .96. Based on the scores on the serious leisure items, two groups were created: high serious leisure and low serious leisure. The median value was used to derive the interval for the two groups. *Sport tourism involvement indicators.* Five variables were used to describe the nature of respondents' involvement in sport tourism participation: miles travelled, training hours per week, money spent, years participated, and number of people in the party. The questions measuring involvement consisted of five open-ended questions as follows: How long have you been participating in the Senior Games? How many hours per week do you spend participating in or training for your sport? How many miles did you travel to the Senior Games? How many people are in your party? Including food, accommodations, dining, and travel how much money do you and your party plan to spend at the event throughout the weekend?

**Results**

The largest group of the respondents was between the ages of 60 and 69 (36.7%); while those 70-79 made up the second largest group (32.1%) and those 50-59 represented the third largest group (23.9%). A small percentage, 7.4%, represented those over the age of 80. A majority of the participants were men (71.1%) with women representing 28.9% of the group. Athletes in the Senior Games tend to be Caucasian (94.5%); less than 5% were minority participants. Sixty percent of the respondents were retired, while 39.4% of the group was still working full or part-time. A large percentage, 82.1%, of the group was married and 17.9% indicated they were divorced,

widowed or single. Pearson correlations coefficients showed that there were a number of statistically significant relationships among the variables (see Table 1). Serious leisure was significantly positively related to the independent variables. Participants who scored high on serious leisure tended to report more time spent on training for the Senior Games, traveled more miles to participate in the event, spent more money for the event, had longer history of participating in the event, and came with more people to the event. Other correlation coefficients reveal that amount of money spent was positively related to miles traveled and number of people in the group, which seemed to be expected results.

**Table 1. Frequencies of Participant Characteristics**

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
50-59	52	23.9
60-69	80	36.7
70-79	70	32.1
80-89	15	6.9
90-	1	.5
Gender		
Male	155	71.1
Female	63	28.9
Race		
Caucasian	206	94.5
African American	6	2.8
Asian	2	.9
Hispanic	2	.9
Education		
High School	13	5.9
College	112	51.4
Graduate School	79	36.2
Marital Status		
Married/Partnered	179	82.1
Single	12	5.5
Other (divorced/widowed)	27	12.4
Employment		
Retired	128	58.7
Employed full time	68	31.2

A stepwise discriminant function analysis was conducted to determine the ability to predict the group difference of serious leisure using the study variables. Discriminant function analysis places cases into dichotomous dependent variables. Of the 218 cases, 215 were used in the analysis. Several cases were excluded because some discriminating variables were missing. The analysis generated a significant function (Wilks'  $\lambda=.911$ ,  $\chi^2(3, N=215) = 19.76$ ,  $p<.01$ ). It indicates that the overall predictors differentiated between the two groups. This discriminant function is contributed positively by participants' training hours per week, miles traveled, and number of people in the party. Functions at group centroids show that this function maximally separates between high serious leisure and low serious leisure. High serious leisure group spent more time on training (mean = 6.86,  $SD = 4.91$ ) than low serious leisure group (mean = 5.61,  $SD = 3.55$ ). High serious leisure group also traveled further (mean = 147.52,  $SD = 170.93$ ) than low serious leisure group (mean = 82.94,  $SD = 91.79$ ). High serious leisure group had more people in their party (mean = 2.40,  $SD = 2.07$ ) than low serious leisure group (mean = 1.88,  $SD = 1.37$ ).

Table 3 indicates that the discriminant function correctly classified 60.0% of the cases. Given that random assignment in this two group situation would result in 50% correct classification, the discriminant function offers improvement.

**Table 2. Zero-order Correlation Coefficients**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Training hours/wk	6.23	4.31	1.00	.05	-.03	.05	-.16*	.15*
Miles traveled	115.17	140.52		1.00	.32**	.11	.15*	.25**
Money spent	118.7	1148.43			1.00	.05	.37**	.16*
Years participated	6.29	6.27				1.00	.01	.17*
No. of people in party	2.14	1.77					1.00	.15*
Serious leisure	6.96	1.09						1.00

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

**Discussion**

Discriminant function analysis identified miles traveled, number of people in the group, and amount of training as most important discriminating variables for serious leisure. This finding supports Stebbins' (1992) conceptualization of serious leisure as well as previous serious leisure researches (Brown, 2007; Green & Jones, 2005; Shipway & Jones, 2007; Shipway & Jones, 2008). Serious sport tourism participants are likely to invest significant personal effort and persevere through training (Shipway & Jones, 2007). The high serious leisure group in this study indicated the likelihood of travelling further and devoting more time to train for the event than low serious leisure group. In addition, social attraction as well as the maintenance and development of the group are important aspects of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007). Based on discriminant function analysis, high serious leisure group were likely to attend the event with more people than low serious leisure group. While the composition of the group was not identified by the respondents (e.g., whether they were spouse, children, or friends), it confirms Stebbins' connotation that participants of serious leisure are benefited through social rewards.

According to Stebbins (1992), serious leisure is represented by the following six defining qualities: (a) perseverance, (b) significant effort, (c) career development, (d) durable benefits, (e) expression of self and identity, and (f) unique ethos. In this regard, the sport tourism indicators used in the present study may reflect three qualities of serious leisure - significant effort (i.e., training hours per week, miles traveled, and money spent), career development (i.e., years of participation), and durable benefits (i.e., number of people in party). Although amount of money spent was not a discriminating variable in this study, the findings showed that other aspects of significant personal effort were key factors in predicting serious leisure participation. It is premature to conclude that distances people travel to participate in an event is the most important aspect of serious leisure, but based on the standardized function coefficient, it could be suggested that extent to which individuals invest efforts to travel was the most significant characteristic in describing sport tourists (Table, 3).

Goeldner and Ritchie (2006) defines a tourist as an individual who travel away from home for a distance at least 50 miles for various purposes such as business, pleasure, and personal affairs. The average distance traveled by the older adults in the present study was 115 miles, and it is suggested that these participants qualify as domestic sports tourists since their purpose of travel was to participate in an amateur sport. As Gibson (2007) noted, people traveling to compete in Senior Games would be classified as active sport tourism participants. While it has been more than a decade since Gibson (1998) introduced the concept of sport tourism,

**Table 3. Discriminant Function Analysis of Serious Leisure**

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' $\Lambda$	$X^2$	df	p
1	0.908	100.0	.299	.911	19.76	3	>.001
Variables	Standardized Function Coefficients		Structure Coefficients				
Training hours/wk	.546		.469				
Miles traveled	.679		.755				
No. of people in party	.489		.474				
Years of participation			.078				
Money spent			.368				
Group Centroid = Low Serious Leisure, -.313; High Serious Leisure, .310							
Classification Results for Serious Leisure Participation							
Actual Group	No. of Respondents	Predicted Group (Percentage)					
		Low Serious Leisure	High Serious Leisure				
Low Serious Leisure	107	75 (70.1%)	32 (29.9%)				
High Serious Leisure	108	54 (50.0%)	54 (50.0%)				
Percentage of groups correctly classified = 60.0%							

researchers have only recently started to investigate serious leisure under the realm of sport tourism (e.g., Shipway & Jones, 2007). An important contribution of this study to the understanding of older adults' leisure experience in general is discovering positive relationships between sport tourism indicators and serious leisure.

Several issues should be considered when interpreting the result of the study. The majority of the participants in this study were Caucasian (94.5%), and many of them had a high education level. In addition, participants in this study are limited to people residing in the Midwest area. It should also be noted that sampling was not a probability method, and thus generalization of the results should be made with caution. Future studies may expand the geographic coverage in data collection because Senior Games participants in other states may have different characteristics and different levels of involvement in serious leisure.

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