The Motivational Trajectory of Active Sport Event Travel Careers: A Social Worlds Perspective

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The pursuit of a lifestyle based upon physically active leisure often entails travel to participate in events. In an attempt to understand the sport and travel patterns of such individuals, researchers have adopted various perspectives. One such approach draws on the ideas of travel careers (Pearce, 2005) and serious leisure (Stebbins, 1992). Getz (2008) proposed that these individuals might follow a career like pattern regarding their involvement and commitment to the activity and termed this potential lifelong career of event-related travel an event travel career. Getz and McConnell (2011) suggested that the event travel careers of these amateur athletes are likely to be characterized by evolving motivations, preferences, and patterns of travel. More specifically, Getz and McConnell proposed individuals engaged in event travel careers follow a trajectory that is represented through changes in six dimensions: motivational, travel style, temporal, spatial, event types and destination criteria. Motivation is considered to be a particularly important dimension in understanding these travel careers as motives drive individuals’ involvement in leisure and tourism activities (Crandall, 1980; Iso-Ahola, 1983).

Recently, Buning and Gibson (2014) proposed the term Active Sport Event Travel Careers (ASETC) to distinguish the active from the spectator form of sport-related event travel (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). Buning and Gibson suggested ASETCs consist of six stages: initiation, introduction, expansion, peak threshold, maintenance, and maturity. To explore the idea of how individuals progress through the trajectory of an event travel career, the concept of social worlds was considered to provide a useful framework, a supposition supported by Getz and Patterson (2013). Unruh (1980) describes social worlds as “…amorphous and diffuse constellations of actors, organizations, events, and practices which have coalesced into spheres of interest and involvement for a participant” (p. 277) typically without a centralized authority structure. Social world membership is considered to develop through four distinct social types that can be distinguished by degree of involvement, these are: strangers, tourists, regulars, and insiders. Strangers are marginally involved and exist outside of the central concerns of a particular social world while insiders are individuals characterized by centralized involvement focused on creating and maintaining activities for other social world members and recruiting new members (Unruh, 1983). Utilizing a social worlds perspective to conceptualize career trajectory, the current study examined motivational progression among cyclists at different stages of an active sport event travel career. Two research questions were posed: (1) what are the motivations of active event cyclists? and (2) how do these motivations evolve along the ASETC trajectory?

Using a mixed methods approach following the development of a grounded theory model using a qualitative approach, the current study investigated ASETCs utilizing quantitative methods to further test the notion of career progression. A questionnaire was developed consisting of five sections, for the current study two were used: motivation and social worlds. Social world involvement was assessed using an adapted version of the social world segmentation instrument (Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998). Motivation was measured using adapted items from several sources: the Leisure Motivation Scale (Beard & Raheb, 1983), charity related motivation (Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007), healthy lifestyle (McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002), and items constructed for the study measuring motives related to giving back to the sport and competition. The questionnaire was distributed on-line to an international sample of amateur cyclists who were actively engaged, beginning, or had culminated ASETCs. The sample was recruited using organizational affiliations (i.e., local cycling clubs), social networks, and industry associations (i.e., cycling based organizations) an approach advanced by Getz and McConnell (2011). The online data collection procedure procured 1452 total usable responses with N=1190 complete responses from 49 states and eight countries. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 85 (M=52.03, SD=13.446) and from 1 month to 60 years of active cycling event travel experience (M=12.42, SD=9.97).

Data analysis included several steps. First, the validity and reliability of the motivation and social worlds scales were
evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach’s alpha. Second, the motivational factors were assessed with descriptive statistics. Third, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) analysis was conducted with the social world segmentation types (outsiders1, occasional2, regulars3, insiders4) and the motivational factors. Regarding RQ1, the sample reported to be highest to least motivated by the following: healthy lifestyle (M=4.44, SD=.54), mastery competence (M=4.25, SD=.55), ‘to compete against myself’ (M=3.92, SD=1.01), social (M=3.84, SD=.66), intellectual (M=3.76, SD=.64), stimulus avoidance (M=3.75, SD=.77), charity (M=3.41, SD=.85), giving back (M=3.21, SD=.78), and ‘to compete against others’ (M=2.88 SD=1.19). Regarding RQ2, the results of the MANOVA indicated a significant multivariate effect between the motives, and social world segmentation groups, Pillai’s Trace = .239, F (27, 4005) =12.851, p<.001. Post hoc analysis using Bonferroni correction revealed numerous differences between the individual social world segmentation groups and motivation factor/items. Notable post hoc results indicate the motives social (M=3.021; M=3.652; M=3.933; M=4.174), mastery competence (M=3.961; M=4.182; M=4.293; M=4.434), giving back (M=2.581; M=2.982; M=3.293; M=3.604) and ‘to compete against others’ (M=2.401; M=2.552; M=2.953; M=3.394) significantly increased through the four social world segmentation groups.

The results indicate that cycling motivation evolves through time and experience as individuals follow the ASETC trajectory confirming Getz’s (2008) and Getz and McConnell’s (2011) suppositions. Motives related to intellectual, social, mastery competence, giving back and competition against others escalate as individuals progress through a travel career, providing measureable career markers for future study. However, motivation related to relaxation and a healthy lifestyle seems to peak at the occasional and regulars stages respectively, which suggests these motives are more quickly activated as the participants are able to experience these motives earlier in their careers. Further, motivation related to charity peaked at the regulars stage, while competition against others peaked with the insiders group.

The evolutionary nature of the motives related to ASETCs identified in this study portray the motivational trajectory of career cyclists from initiation to maturity and provides a framework for the future study of active event travel. As motives are inextricably linked with career stage improved organization and marketing of events and destinations reflecting the trajectory is paramount. Indeed, ensuring successful career progression will allow participants to procure the benefits related to the activity (e.g., social connection, mental/physical health) throughout their potential lifelong involvement. Advocacy groups seeking to cultivate cycling involvement should promote the motivational factors related to career initiation (e.g., health concerns, social, charity) and the motives that drive continued participation (e.g., social, giving back, competition). Thus, sport organizations need to structure events in an effort to allow for successful career development as a portfolio of events must be available based on career trajectory.