Sport Tourism Consumer Experiences: A Comprehensive Model

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ABSTRACT The interest in physical activity and vacations has created a growth in the tourism industry and has greatly modified strategies within the industry. Sport tourism is expanding and many forms of consumption exist within this area. The object of this study is to propose a new framework for analysing sport tourism consumption. This framework illustrates that consumer choices depend upon vacation destinations and sport services offered in relation to the experiences that vacationers are seeking. The originality of this analysis is that it integrates spatial and social dimensions stemming from environmental psychology, ethnology and sociology.

KEYWORDS: Marketing, sport tourism, consumption experiences, postmodernism

Introduction

Tourism has become a major economic activity due to the combined effects of transformation of offers and postmodern requests. The changes which have evolved are such that consumption is more qualitative, more demanding and more varied. As a result of these changes, sport tourism has become a profitable market due to the potential for world-wide destinations and to the diversification of sport services. As a financial generator, this sector is expanding and its actors (local and national) are beginning to exploit this area, particularly because of its contribution to regional development. The sport tourism product can be defined as the association of a tourist stay at a certain destination, complemented or determined by at least one type of sport or physical activity. Five characteristic elements of this are: (a) that actual physical involvement is essential; (b) the duration of the visit must be equal to or greater than two days and one night in order to differentiate it from a recreational stay; (c) the stay may or may not be organized by the client; (d) housing may be at a set location or itinerant; and (e) the sport tourism product is comprised of a group of services which are often intangible.

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With decentralization laws, communities provide real economic and symbolic profit of sport tourism, which can play a role in increasing the value and availability of space, in structuring the area and in protecting and preserving the environment. Today, however, there appear to be unsuitable or inadequate offers compared with the extremely diversified demands, including both destinations and products offered. These changes in requests have made numerous tourist sectors obsolete which, up until now, had satisfactorily explained and understood the behaviour of vacationers (socio-demographic criteria, social groups and trends). This challenges marketing specialists to determine new sport tourism offers, inserting new spatial and social dimensions of postmodern consumption.

On the basis of 'constructiviste' and 'interactionniste' perspectives borrowed from the social sciences, 'sport tourism' – the object of consumption – will be analysed as a type of social action in which people consume in various ways (Holt 1995), seeking pleasurable experiences (individual and/or group) which create subjective emotional reactions for the consumer (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). The research is limited to the study of intrinsic or 'autotelique' dimensions (Holt 1995), where vacationers experience sport tourism in interaction with space and with others. Most theories indicate that the construction of the self emerges from significant emotional experiences that determine the way in which an individual responds in a particular social context (modern or postmodern, for example). Referring to emotional experience in sport tourism suggests that the 'physical and social context' is not only an external source that may modify behaviour, but it also functions in the construction of information and in determining behaviour.

The object of the article is first to present the behavioural and motivational changes related to sport tourism and then to propose a new framework for analysing the sport tourism consumer experience. This framework will be used to study a wide range of consumer experiences. The originality of this procedure lies in the integrative of spatial and social dimensions in analysing consumer motivation with reference to environmental psychology, ethnology and sociology.

The Sport Tourism Consumer: A ‘Postmodern’ Change?

Expectations with regard to vacations are greater today because they correspond to the desire to live intensely, attributing greater meaning to free time. The evolution of tourist behaviour encourages both change and the emergence of new values (Dumazedier 1988). This is noted in the growing desire for autonomy and liberty, instant and optimal pleasure, preference for what is informal and immediate and disinterest for highly structured projects (Raynouard 1989). Holiday makers are looking for excitement and new experiences that will provide good and/or new feelings, stimulating their senses.

Heterogeneous Tourist Motivation and Behaviour

The need for a ‘break’ is one of the principal factors motivating tourists (Iso-Ahola 1982). This is indicated by the search for tranquility, escape, adventure and other fundamental expectations, such as charm, comfort, security and health (Besancenot 1990). Mermet (1996) notes that when French people are on vacation they like to relax and participate in cultural or sporting activities if they choose to. They are looking for independence and conviviality, comfort and adventure, security and variety simultaneously. They are demanding and interested clients who expect to
be treated uniquely. According to Amirou (1999), the tourist’s imagination, more or less structured, is what guides and organizes his/her behaviour. French people want to have more privileged tourist opportunities, as expressed in their common desires to be different, to escape the crowd, to get away from beaten paths, to have unusual experiences, to develop their individuality by refusing to conform and so on. Many recent studies suggest that there is a strong resurgence of ‘maternal’ needs, of being ‘held’, as reflected in the desire for reassurance, comfort, protection and security. This is accompanied by the reappearance of themes regarding authenticity, simplicity and of one’s home, which is always fantasized and associated with a small community. If ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’ are the basis for the diversity of tourist motivation, two other tendencies are also emerging.

On the one hand, the traveller is an observant person who visits infrequently travelled regions in order to appreciate the culture, the beauty of nature and its surroundings and to provide a change from daily routines. Three L’s summarize these motivations: Lore Landscape, and Leisure. This form of tourism, therefore, represents a consumption during which the individual’s experience is privileged, extraordinary and, therefore, sacred compared to daily life in which work and routine signify ignorance (Belk 1987; Jafari 1988; Belk et al. 1989; Graillot 1996; Laplante 1996).

On the other hand, the traveller is a dynamic tourist who is physically active and who takes full advantage of a paradisiacal and contrasted environment. According to Mermet (1996), vacations are a means of evacuating accumulated stress, but relaxation and a change of mind state do not systematically imply being passive. On the contrary, it is from discovering and participating in different attractive and enriching activities that vacationers derive their enjoyment and stability. Tourist stays are, therefore, more and more diversified with the desire to get in shape and become more cultured. According to Holt (1995), they may be consumed for various reasons: ‘classification’ in order to become part of a group or to differentiate oneself from a group; ‘integration’ in order to belong to a community or to emphasize one’s individuality; the search for an experience; or simply for recreation.

In fact, the tourist would like to satisfy a variety of needs associating the past, present and future which are, paradoxically, ‘in oneself’ but not ‘for oneself’. According to Dienot and Theiller (1999), the tourist expects to satisfy poorly defined needs, even though the offers of sport tourism associated with these desires are, by definition, imperfect and generally maladapted. These diffuse wishes of multiple forms are connected by the desire: to escape and change scenery; to evacuate stress due to the daily pressure of living in the fast lane; for physical fitness and well-being due to a sedentary lifestyle at the workplace; to be in style or even avant-grade; to occupy time (free, leisure, vacation) due to work reduction and an annual work schedule; for self-fulfillment; for initiation of new activities because of advanced technology which allows one to learn more quickly. For ‘neo-marketing’ specialists, the new vacationers are more demanding (quality, cost) ‘consum’ actors’, requesting more diversified benefits, with individualized offers. This postmodern evolution has greatly modified and complicated the behaviour of tourist consumers for those who have to respond to their needs (functional) and desires (nonmaterial and emotional) which are not necessarily coherent.
New Experiments in Sport Tourism Consumption

In view of the heterogeneity of consumer behaviours and motivations, the choices and types of tourist consumption appear to be guided by new relationships with oneself, with others and with space (Dienot & Theiller 1999; Amirou 2000).

Physical experiences of 'self-actualization' A fundamental characteristic of sport tourism is that the individual must actively participate, beyond just relaxing or just wanting to have something to do, and must interact with others or with nature. Indeed, the common denominator is that it is, for the most part, an outdoor, individual activity, involving a risk to some extent, with the connotation 'adventure' or 'getting in shape' more or less emphasized. The pursuit of a new physical experience is based upon 'self-actualization' through the (re)discovery of one's intellectual and physical aptitudes. It is characterized by the search for novelty, for 'unknown' nonconformist places where risk is experienced and for the importance of the discovery instilling a feeling of self-worth. It can be broken down into two subdimensions: the desire for independent choices and the desire for self-actualization.

Independence The requirement for autonomy in sport tourism combines the needs for self-norming, diversification and alternation. Participants do as they please. They choose their own type of activity (individual or structured), social relationship and aesthetic model. In addition, there is a choice with respect to the project, its frequency, intensity, place and time. The need for diversification is reflected in the desire that tourists have to participate in a variety of sporting activities (paragliding, canyoning, etc.), or to combine several sports as part of one activity or as part of their entire stay (duathlons and other adventure challenges). Finally, the need to alternate is manifested by the frequent changes in sport tourism activities from one year to another, where some activities end and others begin, a sign of contemporary versatility.

1 Self-actualization The desire for self-actualization is based on two main components: health and challenge. For the most part, sport tourism allows for maximum personal management of one's 'health capital' which increases feelings of well-being, self-control, resistance to fatigue and stress, energy and vitality, self-harmony and relief from tension. In addition, one's imagination can be expressed while looking for something out of the ordinary (Dienot & Theiller 1999). Sport tourism encourages one to surpass one's own physical and psychological resources. The recent focus on physical appearance, the striving for physical beauty and the wish to use free time and vacations wisely (Barel & Butel 1988) justify the investment in a 'corporal capital'. But the drive for effort, exertion and performance (Le Breton 1990; Ehrenberg 1991; Courtine 1993) has progressively been replaced by the drive for 'excitement' and 'emotion'. For Maurice (1987), sensations can be defined as a range of physical, sensual and imaginary experiences, which become part of one's movement and of one's contact with nature. What predominates is the will to attain short-term goals, preferring quality to function, amusement and immediate enjoyment to aesthetics. However, since pleasure is only transient, five major consequences occur: diversified activities; versatile preferences and heterogeneous demands; limited duration; high abandon rate; low proficiency level (Dienot & Theiller 1999).
'Ecological' experiences If ecological development is prevalent today, it is because tourist regions and living areas are being modified because of demands that sporting activities take place in their natural environment. The majority of tourists will only participate in 'nature tourism' if contact with nature is part of their discovery. Natural areas (sea, lakes, deserts, mountains) or picturesque sites (caverns, waterfalls, glaciers) have currently become the major attractions of sport tourism (Duhamel & Sacareau, 1998), where individuals can relax, admire or cross over them. Individuals become 'daily adventurers' in the midst of nature while they participate in sporting activities for a weekend, a few days or for longer periods (Dienot & Theiller 1999). This tourism and sport 'vagabonding' creates a new community sentiment, providing tourists with more meaning than they find in their daily lives even if it is only ephemeral. The extent to which they feel they belong to a particular area is relative to the intensity of the experience.

All sport tourism activities take place in a 'dynamic' (interactive) area. For moderately difficult or 'soft' activities (hiking, diving, for example), nature is mainly for show, admiration, sensory experiences and emotions. For more difficult or 'hard' activities, the place becomes a partner for games, adventure, in the struggle where an opponent may appear hostile, overbearing, mythical and so on. The goal is, therefore, to master this space using the latest and safest equipment and technology but, in order to participate, strength, energy or physical ability are necessary. There is a constant search for a harmonious relationship between human and technological resources and natural obstacles, a task requiring a great deal of personal investment, knowledge and affection for the area. In this 'ecological' experience, sport tourism is only worthwhile in direct relation to the location, without being part of a group or an organization and without reference to others or to external norms.

Social 'affiliation' experiences Emotional experiences also accompany the physical experiences that are sought through environmental contact. But sport tourist behaviours fluctuate between the solitude of a jogger on a beach to a group of mountain climbers or surfers in the midst of a marathon crowd. This diversity of social belonging seems to be related to 'affiliation', perhaps even emotional affection, more or less shared among participants. A metamorphosis of social relationships based on the sharing of emotions and experiences reinforces their similarities (Maffesoli 1988). Redefining sport tourism values helps the person individually as well as the entire group (Badot & Cova 1995). Individualizing does not mean a lack of social relationships, but rather that there are strong feelings of belonging characterized by multiple transient and unstable social clusters. The great majority of participants in large sporting events (running, cycling races) engage in their sport together, rather than against or next to someone, with the intention of helping each other and of sharing an intense and unique moment. Sport tourism is the opportunity to form relationships (friendly, affectionate, warm, welcoming, cordial) with the other vacationers or native residents during the activity, throughout or beyond the stay. Sport tourism consumption is, therefore, no longer founded only on the logic of distinction and differentiation, characteristic of societies where class conflict reigns, but rather it is based on a postmodern logic of community identification, including affection and emotion.

In addition, when individuals wish to enter into a group, it seems small and, therefore, minimizes the restrictions and structure imposed on it from the outside. According to Badot and Cova (1995), this phase permits connections to be broken among individuals from the same group (social, family, ethnic) and it prohibits all
types of contractual groups. Joining these informal groups leads to other forms of sociability based more on good times and fun rather than on status or professional and family roles (excluding work seminars, social tourism or physical education classes). Through the social, temporal and spatial flexibility of these organizations, tourists can utilize different values than those employed on a daily basis. These types of sport tourism communities are volatile and transient, requiring facilities that provide the participants with the opportunity to meet and interact with others.

Proposal of a Framework for Analysing Sport Tourism Consumer Experiences


The originality of the analytical proposal here is the consideration of different theories in studying tourist behaviour with an emphasis in consumer experiences that provide a better understanding of their motivation. It appears that the vacationer is seeking emotions and feelings characterized by symbolic, hedonistic and aesthetic factors. Three types of action form the basis for sport tourist emotions: action which is characterized by risk-taking in a hostile environment; performance which consists of challenging oneself; and confronting others competitively or recreationally (Jeu 1984). It would, however, be an exaggeration to distinguish those who prefer competition and challenge from those who prefer the emotional experience and ephemeral adventure. Besides, sport tourism consumption differentiates itself with respect to the intensity of the experience and the rate at which individuals engage in an activity, become a part of it and detach themselves from it, temporarily or permanently. The pleasure principle is essential in consumer experience satisfaction, ‘hedonism having become the main axis and epicenter of postmodern culture’ (Lipovetsky 1983).

This analytical framework of the sport consumer experience is based on three dimensions: new relationships with oneself (variables concerning self-worth), with the area (spatial variables) and with others (interpersonal variables).

Variables Related to Self-worth

The first dimension, self-worth, is comprised of four categories of variables stemming from different research theories regarding tourist behaviour.

Implication for sport tourism Although the term ‘implication’ has been used to designate very different phenomena (Krugman 1966; Wright 1973; Petty & Cacioppo 1981), Strazzieri (1994) considers the following definition to be generally acceptable. ‘Implication is an unobservable state of motivation, excitement or interest, created by
an object or a specific situation. It influences behavior, certain types of product-seeking, information processing and decision-making (Rothschild 1984). As a psychological state, it is affected by the nature of the product (or service) and by the context of the purchase or the consumption of the product (or service) (Engel et al. 1990). It appears that ‘implication’ regarding destination and sport in general (Bouchet, et al. 2001) is an important variable for sport tourism consumption.

**Perceived risk** Bauer (1960) introduced the concept of perceived risk in the marketing literature. Volle (1995) considers ‘risk as the possibility of sustaining a loss at the time of purchase or consumption of a product, goods or services’. In accordance with Strazzieri (1994), their analysis prefers to separate implication from perceived risk. Therefore, Mallet’s (2001) definition is followed: ‘risk is a two-dimensional (importance and probability of loss) and multi-faceted (social, physical, financial, psychological, temporal) construct’. Ballofet and Rigaux-Bricmont (1998) demonstrated the existence of significant differences in the selection of tourist destinations with respect to the following aspects of risk: physical, financial and psychological. This variable is also of interest when considering physical activities, since the degree of risk perceived by ‘consumers’ is very different depending upon the activity (Zuckerman 1983). The concept of perceived risk is, therefore, related to both tourist destinations and sport services offered.

**Seeking an optimal stimulation level (OSL)** Certain researchers have attempted to make the concept of OSL more operational in studying the tendency to seek excitement (Mehrabian & Russell 1974) in one’s daily life (Graillot 1996), through change (Garlington & Shimota 1964; Penney & Reinhr 1966), by the desire for novelty (Pearson 1970), in preference similarity (Pearson & Maddi 1966) and through sensory experiences (Zuckerman 1964, 1979, 1983). Attempting to reach an OSL is characteristic of individual’s in terms of their general response to environmental stimuli. It has been defined by certain authors as ‘the point of ideal excitement to which every individual aspires and tries to maintain or reestablish through his behavior’ (Berlyne 1960; Fiske & Maddi 1961; Hunt 1963; Driver & Streufert 1965). Thus, the search for an OSL regarding both the physical activity and the destination (new environment) appears to be pertinent in studying sport tourism consumption.

**Seeking variety and novelty** Searching for variety is tied to the need for an OSL that is unique for every individual (Driver & Streufert 1965; Raju & Venkatesan 1980; McAlister & Pessemier 1982) and which is within his/her comfort zone (Hebb 1955; Leuba 1955; Berlyne 1960). Variety is not only obtained through the environment, it also occurs by incorporating a dynamic component into one’s routine (Filser 1994). Menon and Kahn (1995) consider that the need for stimulation can be satisfied either by varying the brand within a product category, or by varying the category of the product or the situation. Within the framework of sport tourism, looking for variety in choosing either a physical activity or a tourist destination, or both will satisfy the need for consumer stimulation. Searching for variation is a means of obtaining stimulation not only through buying or by alternating one’s choices among objects such as stores or product brands, but also in tourist destinations and/or physical activities, simply because one would like to try something different. A destination change would decrease one’s search for variety in physical and sporting activities and, inversely, a physical and sporting activity change would lessen the search for variety
Table 1 Types of space in sport tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open space</th>
<th>Closed space</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical space (modern)</td>
<td>Tourist destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living space (postmodern)</td>
<td>Tourist destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interactive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basic tourism service viewed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as functional space</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sport tourism service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>viewed as experiential space</td>
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</table>

in tourist destinations. Within the tourism framework, novelty seeking is an interesting variable (Lee & Crompton 1992) because the perception of the new destination is a function of the perceived novelty of the object (previous experience), of the environment (cultural atmosphere) and other people (residents or visitors). Indeed, the marketing literature describes the search for novelty as the result of an individual’s efforts to re-establish harmony between his/her OSL and his/her experiences at a lower intensity level (Wahlers & Erzel 1985). The search for novelty, therefore, also appears to be an important element in determining the behaviour of the sport tourist.

**Spatial Variables**

The second dimension, which is more innovative, refers to the idea of space because of the ritualistic, sacred or spiritual dimension (for example, the Himalayas, Hawaii) of certain sites, destinations or tourist attractions that occurs in sport tourism. Away from ordinary life, these locations are considered to be strong, emblematic places, special or paradisiacal, resembling objects on exhibit for tourists in order to facilitate individual or group experiences (Bessiere 2000). For environmental psychologists (Fischer 1997), the notion of space can be broken down in two ways. The first way differentiates functional physical space (locations in which we grow up that have different functions) from personally experienced space (motor, tactile, visual, affective and social experiences producing meaningful cultural values through spatial relations). The second way distinguishes open and public space considered to be natural space (related directly to the tourist destination) and closed and private space, perceived as artificial space created by people, reserved for certain groups (related to sport participation). In any case, individuals can alternate between open and closed spaces during their stay or even during the same day. In order to comprehend the notion of space within the framework of sport tourism, they need to be separated, as environmental psychologists do (Table 1).

*Functional space considered as modern space* Modern space is an area where individuals can observe and consume in a passive manner. The tourist destination is this type of space. From this perspective, individuals only explore exceptional destinations away from their ordinary lifestyles (Remy 2000). Tourist services are perceived as functional space and isolated areas, according to Remy (1994), which means that the service structure provides special privileges. In general, this community may not be regarded as a tourist area (Augé 1997) if it is too conventional and does not allow social relationships to develop. However, it may be seen as a true community if social bonding can occur.
Personal living space considered as postmodern space Postmodern space is area where individuals can interact, feel a sense of belonging and share new experiences. It is not geographical space but is rather made up of individual experiences (Fischer 1981) which become personal living space. The tourist tries to make it feel like his/her own place, to settle in and create a community (Moles & Rohmer 1998). The feeling of belonging constitutes an essential element of one's relationship with space as it informs us of the social attitudes of individuals and groups existing in this space (Fischer 1997). The sense of belonging is important in the development of one's living space (Bonnin 2000) because individuals can familiarize themselves with the space, enabling them to create their own personal space (Fischer 1981). The tourist considered as an autonomous, co-producer of space (Aubert-Gamet 1996) is free to experiment with different available elements. There postmodern individual's therefore, design their own experience, as Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1996) remark. If these elements are transposed to sport tourism, one could imagine that vacationers feel like they own the tourist destination because of their active participation in various sporting activities (personal rock climbing or surfing spots), or because of their unexpected personal discoveries (along hiking trails, during excursions).

Interpersonal variables

The third dimension involves developing new relationships with others. As tourism is a break from one's daily routine and the vacationer no longer physically lives in the same space or in the same geographical location, the social roles also change (Poulain 2000). Faced with unstable family relationships and with the complexity of daily life, tourism is a search, although ephemeral, for social relationships where one no longer feels lonely and isolated. The need for sociability, more humanistic relations and friendlier societies are factors motivating tourists. Sport tourism, therefore, has a socialization function as well (Bessiere 2000).

This phenomenon is not new. Certain authors have already studied the interaction of tourist groups (Graburn 1989; Smith 1989) or of local populations (Mo et al., 1994). It is this postmodern phenomenon that is encouraging individuals to seek group experiences where strong emotional and affective relationships can be formed. In addition, postmodern tourists may create micro-groups for which 'the consumption system is no longer perceived as primary in creating interpersonal relationships but is rather secondary' (Cova & Roncaglio 1999). From this perspective of social relationships within communities, the concept of prolonging one's stay no longer makes sense. One notes, therefore, the emergence of new ways to meet that are mainly opportunities for sharing (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1996). This essentially concerns the tourism and recreational sectors in the sense that there is a rupture in family and professional life. Social relationships help interpersonal exchange in two ways: from oneself toward others and vice versa. The service here is no longer consumed for itself, but as a contributing factor encouraging communication and social relationships (Aubert-Gamet & Cova 1996; Evrard & Aurier 1996; Aurier et al., 2000). 'But the environment could be considered as a personal or group creation deriving its meaning from actual experiences' (Aubert-Gamet & Cova 1996). This is with the understanding that other tourists or native residents are actively involved in the area. It is important to keep in mind that the environment also intervenes as a mediator in social phenomena.
Table 2 Types of social groups in sport tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Closed' social relationship</th>
<th>'Open' social relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social intimacy</td>
<td>Crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Contiguous' social interaction (modern)</td>
<td>Tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Shared' social interaction (postmodern)</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sport tourism, one must examine social interactions in relation to the type of space involved. Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1996) remark that a dichotomy exists whereby modern space is ‘nowhere’, thus, provoking the loss of social relationships versus postmodern space where social relationships are created. In order to study social interactions in these two types of space, the page will review the work of Bourgeon and Puhl (2000) that considers two facets of social relationships: ‘closed’ ‘open’ and the terms ‘shared’ and ‘contiguous’ will be used to distinguish postmodern and modern spaces of social interaction (Table 2).

**Interactions in modern space** Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1996) define modern space as anonymous space in which the individual is alone in a crowd. These spaces of ‘nowhere’, according to Augé (1994) are unlike one’s residence since individuals do not feel that this space belongs to them. In this type of space, solitary social relationships are contiguous (individual experiences occur at the same time, but next to each other, an individual is alone next to others, or an individual is in the middle of a crowd). A closed social interaction is a ‘personal’ interaction with no true sharing among different group members, but rather individuals engage in their activity separately and parallel to one another. Open social relationships occur in large groups where social contact is superficial.

**Interactions in postmodern space** In postmodern space, individuals experience a sense of belonging. In tourism, this space is an extension of one’s residence. Such space allows individuals to share social relationships and emotional experiences together whether the interaction is closed or open. ‘Shared and open’ social interaction is related to the notion of a tribe according to Maffesoli (1988) and it is believed to unite three groups.

1. The primary group includes family and close friends and is a relatively stable group. One or several members of this primary group may accompany the tourist.
2. The secondary group represents friendly professional and non-professional relationships. This is a fairly stable group, but less stable than the first group. The vacationer may be accompanied by one or several members of this secondary group, but this occurs less frequently than for the primary group.
3. The third group is more volatile and ephemeral. It is comprised of native residents of the tourist destination and the people within the sport service structure (employees or tourists) who live together at a given time sharing a common experience. This group may be divided into micro-groups and, depending upon the circumstances, it may last for the duration of the sporting activity and then end once the activity has finished. Tourists may share experiences with other members as they engage in different activities.
The spatial and interpersonal variables related to self-worth allow proposition of a comprehensive model of experiences in sport tourism consumption which integrate new relationships with oneself, with others and with space (Figure 1).

Conclusions

Up until the end of the 1990s, marketing in the tourist industry mainly focused, not on the consumer, but on the 'visitor' or the destination, with strategies being related to the products or services offered. With the evolution of sport tourism, however, offers have become totally inappropriate due to the greater heterogeneity of tourist motivation and behaviour. The object of this study is, therefore, to re-analyse sport tourism consumption by describing the destinations and services offered in relation to the experiences that vacationers are looking for. As a result, this should allow the tourist industry to redefine their strategies or the clientele they are targeting.

It is the contention of this paper that this is an innovative approach for studying the consumption experience because it integrates new relationships with oneself, with space and with others. It is also enriched with ideas stemming from environmental psychology, ethnology and sociology. As this analytical framework is only the first proposal, it needs to be supplemented and refined by further scientific investigation. An initial phase of qualitative research should confirm the pertinence of the variables related to self-worth and also make the new categories of spatial and interpersonal variables more operational. An empirical phase will then need to be conducted in order to validate this model. Should the results of future studies prove to be conclusive, this analytical framework of investigating consumer experiences could be generalized to other marketing areas.
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