

Wine Tourism: A Serious Leisure Approach

Carroll A. Brown, Western Carolina University, USA
F. Ruth Smith, Savannah State University, USA

ABSTRACT

*Today wine tourism is emerging as an important component of rural diversification in North Carolina. Using Stebbins' (1992) model of serious leisure as a guideline, the purpose of this study is to explore how wine tourism may be viewed as a type of serious leisure and to suggest a conceptual **approach** to the study of wine consumers in order to develop effective wine marketing strategies for local wineries in North Carolina. In addition, this study suggests **an approach** that small North Carolina wineries **might use** to identify various types of winery visitors and better position their products.*

Keywords: Serious leisure, Wine consumers, Wine tourism

INTRODUCTION

Recent trends in tourism indicate a growing demand for forms of special interest tourism such as nature-based tourism, festival and special event tourism, sport tourism, adventure tourism, and cultural tourism (Hall & Weiler, 1992; Novelli, 2005; Stebbins, 1992; Trauer, 2006). Cultural tourism is referred to by Douglas, Douglas and Derrett (2001) as a type of cultural immersion that emphasizes “the cultural, heritage or artistic aspects of a destination or experiences and activities for the tourist” (p. 114). A broader definition is offered by Reisinger (1994) who describes cultural tourism as a type of “experiential tourism based on searching for and participating in new and deep cultural experiences ... such as aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological” (p. 24). In other words, as MacCannell (1976) notes, in contrast to mass tourism, cultural tourists are searching for “authenticity” in their tourism experiences.

In Europe and the United States, visiting wineries and exploring wine routes has become an important form of cultural tourism (Hall, Sharples, Cambourne, & Macionis, 2000; Wargenau & Che, 2006). For example, since 2000, the number of wineries in North Carolina has tripled. These wineries have the potential to make significant contributions to the local economy. With wine representing a \$48 million industry, the economic impact of wineries and vineyards in North Carolina is \$813.3 million. North Carolina also ranks 3rd in the nation for wine and culinary tourism. (North Carolina Wine and Grape Council, 2009).

Several researchers (Hall et al., 2000; Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987; Stebbins, 1996, 2002, 2007) have recognized the inter-relatedness of tourism, recreation, and leisure. However, as Stebbins (2007) notes, few researchers (Wearing, 2001; Wearing, 2004; Wearing & Neil, 2001) have attempted to link the concepts of cultural tourism and serious leisure.

Stebbins (2007) argues that cultural tourism can be conceived of as a form of serious leisure and, when pursued as such, cultural tourism results in a special identity which is not found in casual leisure and mass tourism. While mass tourism, such as camper tourism or guided tourism, is accessible both socially and financially to a large number of people, objects that attract the cultural tourist are much less accessible, both psychologically and socially. According to Stebbins (2007), cultural tourist attractions require, for example, the development of specific tastes (e.g. in music, food, or wine), the acquisition of specialized knowledge (e.g., the history of a region, a foreign language, or wine making), or the development of certain social skills (e.g., how to taste wine, how to talk to the locals, how to behave according to their norms).

While it is acknowledged that the region plays an important part in wine marketing, in order to develop effective wine tourism strategies, it is also necessary to understand the demographics and purchasing behavior of the target market. In the formation of market segments, the role of demographic variables is well documented (Barber,

Almanza & Donovan, 2006; Jaffe & Pasternak, 2004). Although recent research has begun to focus on the behavior and characteristics of winery visitors and wine tourists (Alant & Bruwer, 2004; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Dodd and Bigotte, 1997; Dowling, 2001; Yuan, Cai, Morrison & Linton, 2005), it has been noted that in-depth research is needed to examine the nature of the wine consumers in general (Carlsen, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to explore wine tourism as a form of serious leisure and to determine the demographic and psychographic characteristics of wine consumers in North Carolina in order to develop potentially effective wine marketing strategies for small wineries in the state.

We first present the concept of serious leisure, which is used as a framework to guide the study, and review the research on serious leisure and wine tourism. The second section briefly examines the events that have led to the development of wine tourism in North Carolina. The final section discusses the implications for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Serious Leisure

A theoretical framework for the study of leisure is proposed by Stebbins (1982) that places serious leisure in contrast to casual or unserious leisure. Stebbins (2007) defines serious leisure as the “systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling in nature for the participant to find a career there acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (p. xii). Over time, careers of involvement in certain activities develop and typically lead through successive stages of beginning, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline of special skills and knowledge. Serious leisure can lead to self-creation and self-actualization. With changing patterns and perspectives on work, the potential of serious leisure participation takes on greater significance. Its counterpart, casual leisure, is a considerably less substantial form that offers no career (Stebbins, 1992, 2002, 2007).

Stebbins (1992) identifies six qualities associated with serious leisure that distinguish it from casual leisure. First is the occasional need to persevere to overcome difficulties. A second quality of serious leisure is the provision of a career involving stages of achievement and involvement. The third is the requirement of significant personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training, or skills. Fourth is eight durable benefits or rewards of serious leisure: self-actualization, self-expression, self-enrichment, renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, social interaction, and lasting physical products. Another quality of serious leisure is the participant’s strong identification with his/her chosen pursuit. Finally, a unique ethos develops in connection with the activity.

Stebbins (2001) denotes three types of serious leisure participants: amateurs, serious volunteers, and hobbyists. Stebbins (1992) describes a hobby as “a specialized pursuit beyond one’s occupation, a pursuit that one finds particularly interesting and enjoyable because of its durable benefits” (p. 10). Although hobbyists do not have a professional counterpart, they may have a commercial equivalent. Five categories of hobbyists are identified: collectors, makers and tinkerers, activity participants, players of competitive pursuits, and liberal arts hobbyists (Stebbins, 2007).

Collectors gradually acquire the technical knowledge of the social, commercial, and physical conditions that surround their object of interest. In addition, they gain an understanding and appreciation of that object. such as old car collectors (Dannefer, 1980), gun collectors (Olmsted, 1988), stamp collectors (Gelber, 1992), and wine collectors do. Makers and tinkers compose the next hobbyist category which includes handicrafters, inventors, furniture and toymakers, and gardeners. The third type of hobbyist consists of activity participants who engage in non-competitive rule-based activities which have no professional counterparts. Activity participants consistently pursue a leisure activity for personal enrichment, knowledge, skill development and expression. Activities in this category include fishing (Bryan, 1979), kayaking (Bartram, 2001; Kane & Zink, 2004), and snowboarding and mountain/ice climbing (Stebbins, 2005).The fourth category of hobbyists consists of the players of sports and games who compete in mostly non-professional sports. The players are related to one another by a set of rules which governs their actions during the game (Stebbins, 1982). Activities in this category include competitive running (Major 2001), swimming (Hastings & Cable, 2005) and bird-watching (Lee & Scott, 2006).

The final category is the liberal arts hobbyists who acquire knowledge for its own sake (Stebbins, 2001). Stebbins notes that because they generally practice their hobby alone, members of this social world are less evolved than some other hobbyist social worlds. Activities such as language learning (Kennett, 2002), being football fans (Jones, 2000; Gibson, Willming & Holdnak, 2002), and cultural tourism (Stebbins, 1996) are found in this category. Getz, Dowling, Carlsen and Anderson (1999) describe wine tourism as “a form of consumer behaviour based on the appeal of the wine and wine regions, and a development and marketing strategy for the wine industry and destinations in which wineries and wine related experiences are the dominant attractions” (p. 21).

Although few researchers (Brown & Getz, 2005; Ravenscroft & van Westering, 2001) have examined the link between serious leisure and wine tourism, Hall and Weiler (1992) formed a close link when they presented a conceptual scheme relating special interest tourism to the six qualities of serious leisure. Ravenscroft and van Westering (2001) investigated serious leisure within the context of the social world of wine amateurs and suggested that “for serious leisure participants, at least, the quest for distinctiveness is much more about access to the subculture of wine than it is to associations with wine drinking itself” (p. 157). Brown and Getz (2005) explored the relationship between wine consumer preferences and wine tourism destinations. The authors noted that “for those engaged in serious leisure or with high levels of involvement in wine (as part of their lifestyle), there is likely a strong predisposition for pleasure travel to wine regions –or at least to include wine in general-purpose travel” (p. 275).

Wine Tourism in North Carolina

In the early 1900s, North Carolina was one of the top wine-producing state in the United States. However, the state’s wine industry has undergone tremendous change. With the enactment of Prohibition in 1919, the North Carolina wine industry was destroyed and did not begin to operate again as a serious commercial endeavor until the 1970s. Wineries experienced significant growth until the mid-1980s when changes in tax laws and new legislation regarding distribution again stymied the industry (Mills & Tarmey, 2003).

Since 1992, new growth has occurred in the wine industry. Today wine tourism is emerging as an important component of rural diversification in North Carolina. One major factor that has contributed to the growth of the wine industry is the decline of the tobacco crop. The latest federal Census of Agriculture states that 4,736 tobacco farms were lost in North Carolina between 1997 and 2002, representing more than one-third of the tobacco farms in the state (North Carolina Wine and Grape Council, 2009). As former tobacco farmers and others convert to vineyards, grape production has provided a means of farm diversification. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, North Carolina is currently ranked tenth in the nation for both grape and wine production.

The continued emergence of new vineyard and winery projects across the state is breathing new life into the area’s tourism industry. North Carolina is now home to 400 vineyards and at least 70 wineries in 30 counties (North Carolina Winery Association, 2009). Many of these wineries are small, privately owned, and operated with family heritage and tradition. For example, the Yadkin Valley, considered the heart of the North Carolina wine industry, is a 1.4 million acre federally designated American Viticultural Area and the only federally designated viticulture region in the state. There are **twenty** wineries and more than 400 acres allocated to these vineyards. Although early in its development, the Yadkin Valley is poised to become an internationally recognized region for world-class wines (North Carolina Wine and Grape Council, 2009).

Although North Carolina has demonstrated a remarkable ability to produce and sell quality wines, small North Carolina wineries are facing a number of challenges such as climate conditions, changes in public policy, lack of funding, and the need for trained labor. For example, change in public policy, resulting from the FDA regulation of the tobacco industry, led to the subsequent diversification into grape growing. However, grape-growing requires a long term investment of capital. Many older grape farmers cannot afford to take the risk of waiting several years for a return. There is also a need for skilled vineyard workers. In addition, unlike the tobacco industry, the wine industry depends on marketing skills. Winery owners must be able to successfully market their products to wine consumers. In 2005, approximately 800,000 tourists visited North Carolina wineries. (North Carolina Wine and Grape Council, 2009).

We suggest that the exploration of wine tourism as a type of serious leisure using Stebbins' (1992) model of serious leisure as a guideline, considering the demographic and psychographic characteristics of wine consumers, may be used to develop effective wine marketing strategies for local wineries in North Carolina. These kinds of studies may answer the following questions:

- Does wine tourism possess the six qualities of serious leisure as defined by Stebbins (1992)?
- What are the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the wine consumer?
- How can small North Carolina wineries strategically and economically position their products to promote regional wine tourism?

The results of such studies may help small North Carolina wineries through the development of wine tourism marketing strategies designed to attract various types of wine consumers. Regional alliances can help small wineries in rural destinations to recognize the value of tourism networking, cooperative partnerships, and synergistic relationships. In addition, the results of such studies may have significant implications for food and beverage operations and bed and breakfast establishments in the area. For example, forming alliances with restaurants and bed and breakfast establishments in the surrounding area is an important way to promote wine tourism and has the potential to attract tourists to the region. In addition, wineries can work with restaurants and bed and breakfast organizations to put together tourism packages which can be promoted by the local Chamber of Commerce. For example, theme-oriented tourism packages could be designed to highlight current trends such as the slow food movement and interest in organic wines. This research would be timely because, although North Carolina is emerging as a major wine tourism region, there has been relatively little research conducted on the area.

REFERENCES

1. Barber, Almanza & Donovan (2006). Motivational factors of gender, income and age on selecting a bottle of wine. *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, 18(3), 218-232.
2. Bartram, S.A. (2001). Serious leisure careers among whitewater kayakers: A feminist perspective. *World Leisure Journal*, 43(2), 4-11.
3. Brown, G. and Getz, D. (2005). Linking wine preferences to the choice of wine tourism destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43, 266-276.
4. Bryan, H. (1979). Leisure value systems and recreation specialization: The case of trout fishermen. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 9, 174-187.
5. Carlsen, J. (2004). A review of global wine tourism research. *Journal of Wine Research*, 15(1), 5-13.
6. Charters, S. & Ali-Knight, J. (2002). Who is the wine tourist? *Tourism Management*, 23(3), 311-319.
7. Dannefer, D. (1980). Rationality and passion in private experience: Modern consciousness and the social world of old-car collectors. *Social Problems*, 27, 392-412.
8. Douglas, N., Douglas, N., and Derrett, R. (2001). *Special interest tourism: Context and cases*. Milton, Qld: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd.
9. Dodd, T. and Bigotte, V. (1997). Perceptual differences among visitor groups to wineries. *Journal of Travel Research*, 35(3), 46-51.
10. Dowling, R.K. (2001). Wine Tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research* 26(2), 1-2.
11. Gelber, S.M. (1992). *Hobbies: Leisure and the culture of work in America*. New York: Columbia University Press
12. Getz, D., Dowling, R., Carlsen, J., and Anderson, D. (1999). Critical success factors for wine tourism. *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, 11(3), 20-43.
13. Gibson, H., Willming, C., and Holdnak, A. (2002). We're gators...not just Gator fans: Serious leisure and University of Florida football. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34, 397-425.
14. Hall, C. M., Sharples, L., Cambourne, B., and Marcionis, N. (Eds.), (2000). *Wine tourism around the world*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
15. Hall, C.M. and Weiler, B. (1992). Introduction. What's special about special interest tourism. In B. Weiler and C.M. Hall (eds.), *Special interest tourism* (pp. 1-14). New York: Wiley.
16. Hastings, D.W., and Cable, S. (2005). The globalization of a minor sport: The diffusion and commodification of masters swimming. *Sociological Spectrum*, 25, 133-154.

17. Jones, I. (2000). A model of serious leisure identification: The case of football fandom. *Leisure Studies*, 19, 283-298.
18. Kane, M.J., and Zink, R. (2004). Package adventure tours: Markers in serious leisure. *Leisure Studies*, 23, 329-346.
19. Kennett, B. (2002). Language learners as cultural tourists. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29, 557-559.
20. Lee, J-Y, and Scott, D. (2006). For better or worse? A structural model of the benefits and costs associated with recreational specialization. *Leisure Studies*, 28, 17-38.
21. MacCannell, D. (1976). *The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.
22. Major, W.F. (2001). The benefits and costs of serious running. *World Leisure Journal*, 43(2), 12-25.
23. Mannell, R.C. and Iso-Ahola, S.E. (1987). Psychological nature of leisure and tourism experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 14, 314-331.
24. Mills, J. and Tarmey, D. (2003) *A guide to North Carolina's wineries*. Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, Publisher.
25. North Carolina Wine and Grape Council (2007). Quick facts, Retrieved from <http://www.ncwine.org/consumer.html> on August 1 2007.
26. North Carolina Winery Association. (2009). Winery history, Retrieved from <http://www.ncwine.org/consumer.html> on October 4, 2009.
27. Novelli, M. (2005). *Niche tourism: Contemporary issues, trends and cases*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier
28. Olmsted, A.D. (1988). Morally controversial leisure: The social world of the gun collector. *Symbolic Interaction*, 11, 277-287.
29. Ravenscroft, N. and van Westering, J. (2001). Wine tourism, culture and the everyday: A theoretical note. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 3(2), 149-162.
30. Reisinger, Y. (1994). Tourist-host contact as part of cultural tourism. *World Leisure & Recreation*, 36 (Summer), 24-28.
31. Stebbins, R.A. (1982). Serious Leisure: A conceptual statement. *Pacific Sociological Review*, 25, 251-272.
32. Stebbins, R.A. (1992). *Amateurs, professionals, and serious leisure*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
33. Stebbins, R.A. (1996). *The barbershop singer: Inside the social world of a musical hobby*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
34. Stebbins, R.A. (2001). *New Directions in the theory and research of serious leisure*. Mellen Studies in Sociology, vol. 28, Lewiston, NY:Edwin Mellen.
35. Stebbins, R.A. (2002). *The organizational basis of leisure participation: A motivational exploration*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
36. Stebbins, R.A. (2005). *Challenging mountain nature: Risk, motive, and lifestyle in three hobbyist sports*. Calgary, AB: Detselig.
37. Stebbins, R.A. (2007). *Serious leisure: A perspective for our time*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
38. Trauer, B. (2006). Conceptualizing special interest tourism –frameworks for analysis. *Tourism Management*, 27, 183-200.
39. Wargenau, A. & Che, D. (2006). Wine tourism development and marketing strategies in Southwest Michigan. *International Journal of Wine Marketing*, 18(1), 45-60.
40. Wearing, S.L. (2001). *Volunteer tourism: Seeking experiences that make a difference*. Wallingford, Oxon, UK: CAB International.
41. Wearing, S.L. (2004). Examining best practice in volunteer tourism. In R.A. Stebbins, and M.M. Graham (Eds.), *Volunteering as leisure/leisure as volunteering: An international assessment* (pp. 209-224). Wallingford, Oxon, UK: CAB International.
42. Wearing, S.L., and Neil, J. (2001). Expanding sustainable tourism's conceptualization: Ecotourism, volunteerism, and serious leisure. In S.F. McCool, and R.N. Moisey (Eds.), *Tourism, recreation and sustainability* (pp. 233-254). Wallingford, Oxon, UK: CAB International.
43. Yuan, J., Cai, L.A., Morrison, A.M., and Linton, S. (2005). An analysis of wine festival attendees' motivations: A synergy of wine, travel and special events? *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 11(1), 41-58.

NOTES