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Information Sharing Patterns in Serious Leisure Practice: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This paper presents early results of an ongoing research project about Human Information Behaviour (HIB) in the context of Serious Leisure (SL). SL includes a wide range of hobbies, volunteer or amateur activities that people willingly choose to do in their leisure time with a constant dedication during a long period (e.g. coin collectors, bird watchers and amateur photographers). The concept was coined by Robert Stebbins in 1982 (Stebbins, 1982, 1992, 2001, 2004, 2009). Serious Leisure participants passionately engage in SL activities not to gain any profit from it, but just for its own sake.

SL typically requires some special knowledge and specific skills that participants learn over a period of time. During recent years, this concept has been explored in numerous contexts including some that specifically address HIB linked to SL such as gourmet cooking (Hartel, 2006, 2010), food blogging (Cox & Blake, 2011), backpackers (Chang, 2009), liberal arts (Hartel, 2014; Jones, & Symon, 2001), coin collecting (Case, 2009, 2010), motor sport enthusiasts (Joseph, 2016), gardening (Cheng, Stebbins & Packer, 2017), urban exploration (Fulton, 2017) and genealogy (Fulton, 2016; Hershkovitz & Hardof-Jaffe, 2017).

The primary aim of this project is to gain a deep understanding of people’s information behaviours in SL. A qualitative and naturalistic approach has been used and the collected data from a number of semi-structured interviews has been analysed through Thematic Analysis method (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Castleberrya and Nolenb, 2018). The research
population includes people who are involved in at least one form of SL such as a volunteer, hobby or amateur activity. To have a broader perspective, the researcher used a Maximum Variation Sampling method to include people from diverse groups. The results show in all kinds of SL there are multiple information rich tasks and information sharing is a core action in almost every kind of SL studied in this project. Moreover, HIB in SL is usually a profound and pleasurable experience and participants are passionate and well-informed about their favourite topics.

Sometimes SL participants do not seek, collect or share information to necessarily solve a problem or satisfy an urgent need. In these cases, they look for information to truly enjoy a hobby or actively contribute in a volunteer job. They also do not always need information for themselves and frequently just share it with others in a community of interest. That is why information sharing is a significant practice in this context. The results also show in addition of conventional information sharing channels such as social media and newsletters, informal channels like face-to-face meetings and personal chats are also important in this area. Furthermore, they usually share and create information in ‘Information Grounds’ (Fisher & Naumer, 2006). The patterns identified in this study indicate that information sharing in SL context has several unique characteristics which make it considerably different from other environments such as everyday life, work-based or educational settings.

**Keywords:** Information Sharing, Serious Leisure, Information Behaviour in Context, Information Grounds, Qualitative Research

**References**


