An examination of serious participants at the Australian Wintersun Festival

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Events, such as festivals, have been identified as places in which activities are provided for participants to develop skills and build their leisure careers. This study aimed to explore the leisure and tourist behaviours of serious, and at times fanatical, participants at the Wintersun Festival in Queensland, Australia. The weeklong nostalgic celebration of music, dancing, cars and lifestyles attracts participants from distant communities to travel and participate in the activities that are integral to achieving their leisure goals. This study utilised participant observation to identify nine domains which describe and explain the behaviours of participants including specialised travel, lifestyle, identity reinforcement, pride, fanaticism, social interaction, fixated consumption, competition and skill development. The results highlight the specialised travel experience undertaken by participants and the important role of events in fulfilling their personal and social goals.

Keywords: event; serious leisure participants; travel

Introduction

Special events, such as festivals, are predominantly viewed as a place for cultural celebration, entertainment, relaxation and social gatherings (Allen, O'Toole, McDonnell, & Harris, 2002; Getz, 1991). However, events are also observed as a time and place for serious participants to pursue their hobby, to compete and to continue their recreational progress (Frew, 2006; Scott & Thigpen, 2003; Trauer, Ryan, & Lockyer, 2003). While research suggests that serious leisure participants attend events as part of their leisure career (Frew, 2006; Stebbins, 2001), minimal research has been performed at the events they attend to gain insight into serious participants' behaviour. Using an inductive approach from within an event, this study focuses on one event in Queensland, Australia, to discover (1) the social and personal behaviours of serious participants at a festival, and (2) the role of the event in facilitating these behaviours.

The event chosen for the study is the Wintersun Festival, a nostalgia-based event where audiences participate in nostalgic activities, workshops and contests, such as rock'n'roll dancing and classic car restoration. Within this context, the study discovers how events form an integral part of serious leisure careers, and how travel away from home communities, to events, can provide social experiences which will reinforce the value of participants' chosen leisure pursuit.

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The study of event participants

The study has employed a multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of literature related to the study and research of event participants. This approach puts aside questions of whether recreation is a component of tourism (Pigram, 1985) or whether tourism is carried on within an essentially recreational framework (Murphy, 1985), and accepts the view that in many cases the two are mutually supporting (Hall, 1992; Mill, 1990). This broader approach was considered practical to explore the behaviours of event participants who may be seen as both leisurists and tourists. The study is primarily informed by the work of Stebbins (1992, 2001), and yet does not confine its analysis to the serious leisure framework. The inductive approach allows the interaction of ideas and theories from tourism, leisure and fanaticism to provide a holistic view of event participants.

The serious participants in leisure studies

An examination of serious participants at events can be initially informed by the literature exploring serious leisure. Where leisure can be considered objectively as time left over from work and a sense of freedom from obligations (Iso-Ahola, 1980, 1983), the concept of serious leisure promotes an understanding of people who choose to pursue an interest with increased levels of passion and intensity over an extended time frame. Stebbins (1992) defined serious leisure as:

> The systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity that participants find so substantial and interesting that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a career centred on acquiring and expressing its special skills, knowledge and experience. (p. 3)

Serious leisure is thus differentiated from casual and/or project leisure, where the pursuit of leisure activities is not as enduring, or as central to one's life. Through his own qualitative studies, Stebbins (1992) has proposed six basic characteristics that distinguish serious leisure from casual leisure including:

(1) The need to persevere at the activity and overcome danger, fear, embarrassment; where, 'it is clear that positive feelings about the activity come, to some extent, from sticking with it through thick and thin, from conquering adversity' (2001, p. 6).
(2) The availability of a leisure career – where the leisure activity has stages of development, turning points and temporal continuity. The term 'career' also brings with it ideas of accumulating progress, rewards and prestige.
(3) Significant personal effort based on skill, training and knowledge. Where casual leisure may not require effort, serious leisure participants make a personal effort through, for example, reading, workshops, classes and contests.
(4) The realisation of various special benefits, rewards or outcomes. Stebbins (2001, p. 13) identified 10 rewards, both personal and social, which include personal enrichment, self-actualisation, self-enrichment, self-expression, self-image, self-gratification, recreation (regeneration), financial return, social attraction, group accomplishment and contribution to the group. Many of these rewards are intrinsic; participants 'pursue their vocations and avocations primarily for self-interested reasons' (Stebbins, 1992, p. 96).

(5) A unique ethos and social world, which is seen as 'an internally recognisable constellation of actors, organisations and events and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants' (Unruh, 1979, p. 115 cited in Stebbins, 2001). This implies that there is a level of social activity or context that is desired for the pursuit of the activity.

(6) An attractive personal and social identity – where participants identify strongly with their chosen pursuit to form a new or altered identity. 'Some life-styles offer their participants a special social identity. In other words, the participants are members of a category of humankind who recognise them-selves and, to some extent, are recognised by the larger community for the distinctive life they lead'. (Stebbins, 2001, p. 19).

These six characteristics have been used to frame a disparate collection of serious leisure studies (see, e.g. Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Gillespie, Leffler, & Lerner, 2002; Hamilton-Smith, 1993; McQuarrie & Jackson, 1996; Parker, 1987) which have contributed to a larger pool of knowledge about serious leisure partici-pants both as individuals and as members of a unique social world. While all the characteristics are relevant to this study, those that focus upon the leisure career are particularly pertinent. The five stages of a leisure career (beginning, development, establishment, maintenance and decline) explored by McQuarrie and Jackson (1996) suggest that a career is not necessarily linear but features stages of development between which the boundaries of the stages are somewhat imprecise. Career continu-ity can be viewed as a 'career history', or a 'subjective career', seen from the eyes of the people pursuing it (Stebbins, 1992, p. 69). Leisure careers are dotted by turning points which Kane and Zink (2004, p. 338) identified as, 'significant events or milestones, often in the form of first time events or the mastering of some skill'. The achievement of milestones allows participants to progress further in their perceived leisure career.

Travel is an important aspect in the development of some types of leisure careers, and yet the significance of travel is often understated. As highlighted by Frew (2006), travel provides access to activities such as contests, conventions, shows and challeng-ing environments and, as such, becomes a means to connect with other like-minded participants. Without travel, pursuit of leisure goals may become limited to the resources and networks of one's own community. Stebbins acknowledges recreational tourism as 'hobbyist or amateur activity carried out away from home by enthusiasts financially able to travel in pursuit of it' (Stebbins, 2001, p. 74), and yet our knowl-edge of tourism suggests a wider purpose. As Hall (1992, p. 69) simply suggests, 'tourism provides an outlet for avoiding something and for simultaneously seeking something', where tourists seek to escape from both personal and inter-personal aspects of their life to seek other rewards. Iso-Ahola (1983) proposed that these rewards include ego-enhancement, learning and competence, corresponding well to the intrinsic rewards of serious leisure.

Moreover, tourism products, such as guided tours, have a further role to play in the development of serious leisure careers. Kane and Zink (2004) demonstrated that tour-ism experiences (specifically the use of packaged tourism products) can act as markers in serious leisure careers. Their study found that kayakers used adventure tours as a way to extend their leisure career to pursue new challenges in remote locations, and reinforce social networks and identity. It is conceivable that special events are also markers for serious participants, and yet little research shows how this would occur.

Travel for the purpose of pursuing a recreational interest has been defined as special interest tourism (SIT) by Derrett (2001), Weiler and Hall (1992) and Trauer (2006). While not all special interest tourists have a career-like interest in their pursuit, research has identified visitors with these characteristics in areas such as cultural tourism (McKercher, 2002; Stebbins, 1996), adventure tourism (Morpeth, 2001; Ryan & Trauer, 2003) and eco-tourism (Weaver, 2002). Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) suggested that a spectrum of special interest tourists may describe the varying degrees of interest and experience of its participants, ranging from dabblers through enthusiasts, experts and fanatics. Experts and fanatics are more likely to choose specialist destinations where they can pursue their hobby. Further, they suggested that these attributes affect touristic decisions such as destination choice, mode of travel and choices such as group versus independent travel.

Brotherton and Himmetoglu's (1997) suggestion that tourists can be described as fanatical is also supported in recreational studies of weight-lifting (Lehmann, 1987), fandom (Jenson, 1992) and football (Redden & Steiner, 2000), where participants can develop an intense focus and heightened value of a leisure activity which can engulf their lives. But are these participants fanatical in the literal sense?

According to theoretical literature, the study of fanaticism is subjective, where 'one man's fanatic is another's four square saint' (Redden & Steiner, 2000), and yet the behaviours and values of fanatics can be defined by the presence of two key psycho/social characteristics, of intensity and value-attitude (Rudin, 1969; Steiner, 2004). Intensity can be observed in 'the degree of energy with which one lives, feels, thinks, works, and in general confronts the objective world' (Rudin, 1969, p. 19). Value-attitude examines the value in life that is given to a pursuit, that far exceeds that given by other people in society (Rudin, 1969). The values attached to the fanatic's pursuit take on a meaning that allows them to reduce the value of other seemingly normal human needs and subsequent attitudes to people. While there is a dark side of fanaticism (Rudin, 1969) often seen in the destructive behaviour of religious fanatics, writers remind us of the place of fanaticism in developing and maintaining culture and society (Haynal, Molnar, de Puymege, 1987; Rudin, 1969). As Perkinson suggests, 'The unity of our present culture, the breadth and depth of our current culture, we owe in great part to those fanatics who preceded us' (2002, p. 171). Accordingly, fanaticism can be observed in leisure where participants become so intensely passionate about a pursuit that it becomes central to their life and their value system (Mackellar, 2006), affecting the time and effort they expend as well as the money and resources they invest in consuming merchandise and rare and authentic items (Redden & Steiner, 2000).

Serious participants have also been discussed in studies of sports tourism, in which 'hard core' participants are those who travel to events to participate and compete as a serious competitor or games enthusiast (Trauer et al., 2003). Accordingly, Green and Jones (2005) have considered how sport tourism may facilitate serious leisure, namely as '(1) a way to construct and/or confirm one's leisure identity, (2) a time and place to interact with others sharing the ethos of the activity, (3) a time and place to parade and celebrate a valued social identity, (4) a way to further one's leisure career, and (5) a way to signal one's career stage' (p. 175). These ideas are supported with research by Shipway and Jones (2007, p. 378), who suggested that attendance at a sports event provided participants with an opportunity to 'undergo an "identity transformation" (in reality, a shift in identity salience) and become "serious", almost professional runners'. To some, the highly competitive and

exertive contests of rock'n'roll dancing seen at Wintersun may be also considered part of the new trend of dancesport (http://www.rockroll.com.au/arrdc/rrcabou.htm), and therefore part of sports tourism.

The synthesis of theory related to serious leisure participants in tourism and leisure has identified the known characteristics and behaviours of serious leisure participants. However, it has also identified gaps in current knowledge about the behaviours and experiences of serious participants at events. In terms of leisure theory, questions remain about how attending an event assists in developing the six characteristics of serious leisure identified by Stebbins (1992), and the role of the event in providing travel opportunities – to escape from everyday lives and seek new experiences. These questions have been explored in the two research questions for this study – examining the behaviours of serious participants at the festival, and the role of the event in facilitating these behaviours. However more opportunities exist for further research at various sports, cultural and special interest events.

Methods

The study utilised an inductive approach to derive meaning from the data collected, via the methods of participant observation described by Spradley (1980) and used successfully by leisure researchers Scott and Godbey (1994), Kyle and Chick (2002), Bowie and Chang (2005) and Johnson and Samdahl (2005) among others.

The methods included four phases of data collection: written document search, formal interviews with the Wintersun event director, the collection of observational field notes and images, and informal ethnographic interviews at the event. The use of multiple sources and varying methods of data collection increased the credibility of the research, ensuring that the findings and interpretations were consistent (Patton, 2002). Each method is described ahead in more detail.

Two researchers from the Centre for Regional Tourism Research had attended the event for the past four years, collecting a variety of images and data as described ahead. Their knowledge and experience of the event were as university researchers and spectators, not as leisure participants. Those interviewed at the event were aware of our involvement in the event in this role. This paper presents an interpretation of the experiences of participants as I, the primary researcher, have understood them to be from within this event-based environment.

The event and its participants

The event chosen for the study was the Wintersun Festival, an annual event held in the coastal town of Coolangatta, in Queensland, Australia. The event has grown from a small event focussed on rock'n'roll to a wider nostalgia theme, aimed at attracting tourists to the town over winter. Attendance at the event was approximately 500 in 1988, growing to 10,000 in 1998, and 50,000 in the years of this study, 2004/05. According to the festival director, the demographic profile of visitors has been consistent over the event's more recent history with around 50% of the audience being classified in the baby boomer segment (40–55 years), and a further 30% as older empty nesters. Approximately 20% of the audience are retired. Important to this study is the finding that nearly 70% of visitors return annually, indicating the importance of the event to its participants.

The festival aims to recreate the ambience of winter holidays in the sun, with rock'n'roll dancing, authentic fashion and cruising in classic cars. More serious participants dress up in costumes to attend the activities, which include music concerts, contests, workshops and car displays known as *show'n'shine*. Some of these activities are ticketed, while many are free performances in public spaces such as parks and closed-off streets. The transformation of the township is a feature of the event, with rows of immaculately restored cars lining the streets, and rock'n'roll music drifting from buskers and stages. The sights and sounds of the 1950s transform the town into an artificial environment that welcomes participants to indulge in nostalgic and hedonistic behaviours.

Previous studies of the audience suggest an interactive mix of spectators and participants (Mules & Ayling, 2005) with various levels of involvement in the planned activities. However part of the attraction of the event for spectators is the participation of recreational car and dance participants who travel from other states of Australia and from New Zealand in groups of between 5 and 50. These participants are members of car clubs and associations, dance clubs and other social 'rocker' clubs and are the featured population for this study.

This study has focussed on two groups of participants – car enthusiasts, who participate in contests, runs and cruises; and rock'n'roll dancers who participate in contests, workshops and social dances. The two groups interact socially throughout the event, sometimes travelling to the event together, and sometimes married to each other. While their pursuits may differ in terms of skills and knowledge needed, they have many similar characteristics. For example, members of both groups are enthusiastic members of their respective clubs, which hold regular outings, social events and meetings. They attend other events around the country to pursue their interests and to celebrate an era of rock'n'roll. They are more broadly celebrating a generation and more narrowly focussing on an interest (or hobby) which they can master.

Over 1000 cars manufactured before 1975 were officially entered in the event in 2004, many of which had returned from previous years. Their proud owners are car enthusiasts who fall into the 'tinkerers and makers' category of hobbies suggested by Stebbins (1992, p. 10). Rock'n'roll dancers are 'activity participants' whose activity requires systematic physical movements conducted within a set of rules (1992, p. 11). Both groups practice and perform at a hobbyist level. Very few of these participants have paid jobs in the same vocations, but most have good paying jobs that allow them the financial security to travel to events. Both dancers and 'rodders' (as car enthusiasts are sometimes called) have a commitment to maintaining their clubs, which in some cases have existed for 30 years. Further information about the clubs was discovered in the document search and through the formal and informal interviews.

Document search

The first phase of the research involved an extensive search for documents related to the event, including local government reports, media articles, academic articles and promotional material such as programmes and posters. Of particular relevance were the reports, discussions and images found on websites of special interest groups attending the event. These websites created a history of attendance for some groups relevant to the study, documenting their commitment to attending the event over many

years. These sites were studied extensively for their content and as a contribution to designing interview questions for both the organiser and the participants.

Formal interviews

Formal interviews with the event director provided vital contextual data surrounding the event's history and development, as well as information on the profile and motivations of its audience. An in-depth interview conducted prior to the event in 2005 used a series of descriptive, structural and contrast questions as suggested by Spradley (1980). The interview was tape-recorded (with permission) and was guided by an interview agenda (Scott & Godbey, 1994). The agenda however was flexible enough to allow open-ended responses which could explain the complexities of participation at the event. Importantly, the interview also provided information on how to identify and seek out serious participants at the event. Stebbins' six characteristics of serious leisure were used as indicators of serious leisure activity (Table 1), where these would allow visual identification of potential respondents. These could then be further clarified through initial screening questions about club membership and attendance at this and other events. The fourth criteria 'the attainment of special benefits or rewards' was understandably not included as a visual indicator. The successive return of participants to the event over several years was also one indicator that participants were in the 'maintenance' stage of their leisure career, enjoying the success of attending parades and public gatherings having learned the ropes, and displaying the objects or skills of their endeavour with some pride (Stebbins, 1992, p. 89).

Participant observation at the event

The third phase involved observation at the event, undertaken over two successive years in 2004/05. Two researchers were used as moderate participant observers attempting to 'maintain a balance between being an insider and being an outsider' (Spradley, 1980, p. 60). Taking the role of spectators at the event, they attended a

Table 1. Indicators of serious leisure activity.

Stebbins' six characteristics	Car enthusiasts	Dancers
(1) Perseverance over time	Repeated event registrations of cars over 5–10 years were shown on stickers on the cars. Display of cars in parade and activities	Repeated entrance to contests over 5–10 years
(2) Leisure career	Entry in contests and cruises throughout Australia. Membership of a car club for 5–10 years	Repeated entry (and success) in contests and workshops. Membership of a dance club for 5–10 years
(3) Skills and knowledge	Technical prowess of car displays – some cars have display boards with technical information about models and restoration	Hand-crafted costumes with highly authentic and detailed elements. Detailed knowledge of fashion of the era and where to buy it
(5) Social world, and (6) Social identity	Club membership displayed on cars, t-shirts and jackets	Club membership displayed on t-shirts, jackets and buildings

variety of activities such as concerts, contests, car displays, street parades and markets. In the first year the researchers blended with the 50,000 people in the streets of Coolangatta, entering in casual conversations with other spectators about aspects of the event and photographing the objects of interest and attraction (mostly classic cars and dancers). The researchers began making descriptive observations with the general question in mind of 'what is going on here?' (Spradley, 1980, p. 73). The observations and conversations were transcribed into field notes while on-site, which provided an immediate condensed account of what had occurred. These notes included descriptions of audience behaviours, phrases that were used, names of participating car clubs and dance clubs, and details of those who were actively participating through membership stalls and displays. These were later expanded offsite to fill in the gaps and expand the single words and phrases made on-site, and further to make basic analyses of cultural meaning and interpretations (Spradley, 1980).

Photographs and video footage were also taken at the event to try to capture the wider cultural scene and make reliable observations to return to for analysis. The images were useful throughout the analysis in what is described as the 'blow up and show up effect' (Crawford & Turton, 1991), where things occur that are too quick to see or, as in the case of an event, are happening *en masse*. A crowded and busy event offers known challenges in data collection (Smith, 2004), some of which were overcome by analysing images.

In the subsequent year, these techniques were used again in combination with informal ethnographic interviews (described ahead) to make more selective and focussed observations – indicative of the development research process described by Spradley (1980).

Informal ethnographic interviews

The third phase involved informal ethnographic interviews conducted with serious participants at the event. A process of purposeful sampling was used to engage suitable participants, identical to the process used by Kyle and Chick (2002). Two researchers circulated throughout the event venue to identify and engage with serious participants, utilising a set of criteria previously developed with the festival director (see Table 1). These visual clues to finding serious participants were clarified by their intensity and zeal for the activities at the event. Serious participants displayed heightened enthusiasm and energy towards competing and/or participating in contests and dances and allowed selection of potential respondents. Other screening questions included the length of time they had persevered in the pursuit, and the other club activities they would pursue in a year.

On finding suitable serious participants, informal recorded interviews were undertaken in the course of participant observation throughout the event site. The interviews were guided by a set of 10 questions designed to discover more about the serious nature of participation at this event and in other aspects of participants' leisure career. Interviews included questions aimed at finding the similarities and differences between respondents and lasted for between 10 and 20 minutes. While efforts were made to ask a similar set of questions from all respondents, at times it was necessary to extend the line of questioning where new insights provided by one informant were verified in interviews with others (a technique also used by Scott & Godbey, 1994). While there were some rejections, 35 participants agreed to discuss their pursuit in a recorded conversation.

Data analysis

The aim of data analysis was to search for cultural patterns displayed in the social situation of the study (Spradley, 1980). It involved the systematic examination of the situation to determine its parts, the relationship between them and the relationship to the whole. Patterns were identified through the classification of data into categories, or cultural domains – where a category includes smaller categories. As with the study by Scott and Godbey (1994), many categories were emergent (e.g. language and behaviours of car owners) and others were predetermined (e.g. perseverance, social world), where the use of predetermined categories allowed comparison with other related studies. Importantly, these categories were treated as sensitising concepts (Scott & Godbey, 1994).

Further analysis was made of the semantic relationships within the domain; for example, Marine Parade *is the place for* car enthusiasts to display cars, and dance workshops *are used for* skill progression. As suggested by Spradley (1980), this was followed by a taxonomic analysis that searched for categories, organised on the basis of a semantic relationship; for example, grouping other things *that are used for skill progression*. The study was narrowed further to identify the cultural meanings that come from both similar and contrasting patterns. Componential analysis assisted in seeking attributes associated with cultural categories, seeking, for example, the differences between types of serious participation through contrasting dimensions. This process led to the development of a 'schematic diagram' of the cultural scene (Spradley, 1980 p. 149) and visualisation of the relationships among domains. The diagram, shown in Figure 1, was discussed at length with the second researcher, festival director, the research supervisor and with an expert in the field of event studies. Although most agreed with the principles of the domains, additions and changes were made to some of the relationships illustrated. This type of process ensured trustworthiness of the data and its representation (Johnson & Samdahl, 2005) and was continued throughout the process of developing the ethnography further.
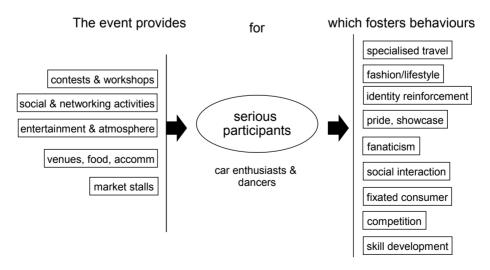

Figure 1.   Schematic diagram of the cultural scene.

Results

The behaviours of serious participants at the event were identified using the developmental research sequence (Spradley, 1980) described earlier. This resulted in the nine inter-related domains describing participant behaviour, illustrated in the schematic diagram in Figure 1.

The diagram assists in ordering and describing behaviour and in explaining the phenomena at hand, but does not prescribe a model for future research. Discussion is made in the relationships between Stebbins theory and the behaviours identified in Figure 1, indicating how Stebbins characteristics are developed and/or how events provide an environment where these characteristics are enhanced, developed or encouraged to occur. To assist the presentation of these results, the domains are presented in two overarching categories related to personal behaviours and social behaviours.

Personal behaviours

Personal behaviours relate to the specialised travel needs, personal identity reinforcement, fashion/lifestyle choices, pride and displays, and fanaticism which were observed in the participants. These domains are described ahead.

Specialised travel needs

Conversation with serious participants indicated that travel to events such as Wintersun was an integral part of their leisure pursuit which they repeat every year. As suggested by Iso-Ahola (1983), travel allowed them to both escape from their home communities and to pursue their recreational activity. As dance enthusiast Jack described it, 'It's a chance to relive the past, that's what it's about, and I think everyone gets caught up in it. Just takes you completely away from your present-day lifestyle and takes you back into the past'. As this quotation shows, the two elements of recreational travel are inter-related; the event is attracting Jack to travel away from his present lifestyle, and to a place where he can relive the past, which he chooses to do through dance.

Travel to the event represented truly specialised travel as described by SIT researchers Trauer (2006), Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) and Weiler and Hall (1992). Specialised travel behaviours were especially prominent among car enthusiasts, with no two itineraries exactly the same. Over 1000 participants drove to the event, from almost as many locations, some from over 2000 km away. Some chose to drive their car while others towed it on a specialised trailer. Car participants needed to plan a specialised itinerary that would get them to the event, often using stopovers and back roads that suited the pace of their car. One participant recalled how they had had to overcome breakdowns, using bits of wire to hold the engine together, and had called on other car enthusiasts to tow them to the nearest garage. Preparations made especially for the event included accessing parts, polishing and buffing, and ensuring the car was registered and roadworthy. For some, the event provided a deadline for preparing a car.

In terms of Stebbins (1992, 2001) characteristics, the observations of car participants described earlier highlighted their perseverance to prepare the car and travel to the event. Many conversations revolved around the efforts they had made to get their

car to the event, and the adversity they had overcome. In order to travel, car enthusiasts must have the skills and knowledge to fix and maintain their own cars, gained from years of reading and networking with other car owners. Travel in itself is a challenge to be mastered which, as described by Stebbins (1992), brings intrinsic rewards through self-actualisation.

The mode of travel for the dancers was often less important than ensuring that they arrived. Many ensured that they made their bookings well in advance, using their own personal methods of bookings. While some travelled with the car participants, most made their own specialised plans to fly, drive or catch the train. As stated by one participant, 'a good dance is worth the time it takes to get there'.

Other forms of specialised travel were evident in the accommodation used. Larger dance clubs booked out whole floors of apartment blocks to be together at the event. These were booked one or two years in advance – *we do it each year, we do it ourselves*. Personalised travel plans ensure serious participants get the facilities they want and need. For example, the inclusion of secure parking prevents any vandalism or theft of prized cars for participants concerned for the security of their car at night.

While travelling to the event was a challenge in itself, travelling to an event also made other aspects of developing a serious leisure career possible. The further development of Stebbins' six characteristics were shown to be facilitated by travelling *away* from home and *to* an event by way of (1) access to activities such as contests that were not available at home, thereby allowing development of new skills and knowledge, (2) access to a wider social world of participants who share the same ethos and values, and (3) celebration of personal and social identity in an accepting and encouraging environment. These factors created rewards of self-actualisation, acceptance and understanding which promote further participation in the pursuit.

In a similar finding to Shipway and Jones (2007), travel to the event across vast distances in Australia (and for some internationally) was not a barrier to developing and celebrating a leisure career; rather it was a necessary part of its development. Many participants indicated that travelling to regular events in Australia was an annual activity, which could be described as an event circuit. This finding suggests that more consideration be given to the role of events in developing serious leisure careers, as milestones in a career path, and as a place for developing new and existing social worlds.

Other conversations with participants suggested that serious participants from some small communities might need to travel to events to find the reinforcement and support of others who share their interest and passion, as well as finding activities such as workshops and competitions, which will develop skills and knowledge. Results in the following domains explain how these experiences occurred, and the importance of the event environment in facilitating them.

Personal identity reinforcement

Wintersun offered serious participants a range of opportunities to reinforce their leisure identity as dancers, rockers, car enthusiasts or hot-rodders. As described by Stebbins, both dancers and car enthusiasts were 'members of a category of humankind who recognise themselves and, to some extent, are recognised by the larger community for the distinctive life they lead' (Stebbins, 1992, p. 19). They typified his observations about serious leisure participants being 'inclined to speak proudly, excitedly, and frequently about them to other people, and to present themselves in terms of these pursuits' (1992, p. 7). A large part of their leisure identity was the display of 1950s

Figure 2.   Rock'n'roll dancers. Source: With permission from P. Derrett.

style clothing, cars and music. As shown in Figure 2, the participants had expended time and effort in creating an image that would reflect their chosen leisure identity. The figure shows a couple who are passionate about rock'n'roll dancing and spend many hours carefully crafting their dance costumes as well as their dance moves.

The event provided a safe environment where serious participants were free to indulge their chosen lifestyle by proudly displaying their own identity, much to the thrill and appreciation of spectators who took photographs and congratulated them on their appearance. The identity of serious participants was thus reinforced not only by complete strangers but also by those in their specialised social world. It is unlikely that this level of support is shown in participant's home communities.

One example of this was provided by Katie, who stated that the event provided an opportunity to feel satisfied with her own identity – which she stated simply as 'it's the one time when I can feel normal'. Raised by a father who also is passionate about classic cars and president of a classic car club, car activity 'has always been a big part of our lives'. Surrounded by over 1000 cars and car owners, she indicated that the event made her feel that this level of dedication is normal in many other people's lives too. Event participation led to a 'just right reinforcement' (Bryan, 2000) of norms and activities that helps to sustain belief in a participant's identity.

The suggestions of Green and Jones (2005), that events provide a way to confirm one's leisure identity, share the ethos of the activity and celebrate a valued social identity, are particularly pertinent. The event itself provided an important social context for clubs and other networks to meet in one place and celebrate shared values and ideas. Furthermore, the researchers observed the shared joy and enthusiasm at the event as participants acknowledged their presence in a wider social network which also had the same values and shared beliefs. As one participant from Rockhampton (1500 km away) stated, 'Last

year, we didn't realise how strong rock'n'roll was till you come and see the thousands that do it, you know; even though there is two clubs in our town we couldn't believe it'. Our observations concurred with Green and Jones' (2005) view that events contribute greatly to celebrating a valued social identity. Socialising at the event is about celebrating shared values and a time of *classic not plastic* when cars and music were at their perceived best. In a study of kayakers, Kane and Zink (2004) observed that 'their [kayaker] identity made them distinctive from other tourists and from the general public' (p. 336). This distinctiveness is also important in a public event situation, allowing participants to instantly socialise with others who are serious about dancing and/or cars, as well as to reinforce the overall acceptance of their social leisure world.

Fashion/lifestyle choices

Much of the identity of serious participants was expressed by wearing fashions that are authentic to the era. As shown in Figure 3 distinctive skirts, bobby socks, shoes, shirts and hairstyles were worn by female serious participants, and similarly distinctive pants, shoes and shirts by the men. Dressing up in these fashions highlights a shared pattern of behaviour of serious participants which parades their lifestyle to spectators in the audience. A lifestyle, as described by Stebbins (1992, p. 19), is 'a distinctive set of shared patterns of tangible behaviour that is organised around a set of coherent interests'. Both car enthusiasts and dancers provided tangible behaviours to observe and photograph, highlighting the importance of this era to their lifestyle. For example, authentic, often hand made, shoes and dresses were important items worn by serious participants.

Figure 3.   Fashions displayed by serious participants. (Source: author).

Many serious participants also suggested they wore these style of clothes in their everyday lives – reflecting their pursuit as a lifestyle choice, as well as a way of reinforcing their identity as a rock'n'roller, rockabilly dancer or car enthusiast. For the most part, these displays of fashion also reflected their social identity as part of a social scene, such as rock'n'roll, or more specifically as a member of a club, such as the South Coast Rockers. Logo-bearing clothing was also worn on everything from caps, clothes and even from apartment balconies to highlight participant's commitment to clubs such as the KO Rockers, other car events (e.g. Gold Coast Indy and Brisbane Show'n'Shine). Kane and Zink (2004) found similar results among kayakers who displayed an identity mainly for intra-group and other kayakers' viewing.

The importance of these behaviours to the event cannot be overstated. The fashions of the participants helped create an environment that had realistic and authentic elements of the rock'n'roll era, as well as providing the spectacle for spectators.

Pride and displays

Consistent with past research into motor sports (Dannefer, 1980), car enthusiasts were highly focussed on displaying, protecting and conversing about their cars. They mostly sat with their family, next to the car all day for two days, talking to members of the public and other car participants about where they found it, how many hours it took to restore (often thousands of hours) and recounting, with much visible pride, how they went about finding parts and fixing it. As such, the event provided an opportunity to achieve the intrinsic rewards discussed by Stebbins of self-actualisation and self-gratification.

Apart from the cars themselves, conversations reflected pride in the clubs to which car and dance members belong. Members proudly wear jackets and caps showcasing the strength and active involvement of their club. They enthusiastically talk about their club and the perseverance of maintaining the activities they coordinate. As Bob stated, 'You gotta work hard to keep a club going these days'. The clubs were an important part of the social world of many serious participants discussed further in social behaviours.

Fanaticism

In the first year of the study, the word fanatic arose often in conversations with the participants and with the festival director. The word was used to describe the most serious and committed event participants who had an almost manic zeal for their leisure participation. Participants were observed to show intensity towards their activities, which was consistent with the characteristics identified by Rudin (1969) and Steiner (2004). Intensity was observed in the physical movements and expressions, such as changing of voice into rapid excitement, especially in talking to other participants about their pursuit. They exhibited deep love and passion, with both of these terms used often in reference to both cars and dancing, and as a reflection of their own self-identity, '[we are] pretty close to a fanatic I think, we love cars big time'.

Conversations with these participants reflected the value that they placed on their pursuit as being greater than their family, job or other component in their life. As suggested by Rudin (1969), this value far surpasses what others in society would see as reasonable.

Fanaticism was also associated with total life centrality and goal setting – *that car is his whole life*. For many the goal of attending the event with their car was to be achieved, as suggested by Rudin (1969), under any circumstances and with ultimate effort. Thousands of hours work preparing the car and thousands of kilometres to travel were no impediment to preserving the heritage of the car and its era.

Many serious participants referred to themselves as fanatical, while others suggested they were clearly heading towards becoming a fanatic, having progressed from being a novice, through enthusiast to fanatic. As Sid suggested, 'After you build a few of them you become a fanatic'. The self-acceptance of the identity of a fanatic points to their acknowledgement of a level of intensity, passion and central life interest.

Social behaviours

Four of the domains were grouped into the category of social behaviours, which relate to behaviours reliant upon interacting, networking and competing with other serious, and less serious, participants. The concept of a 'special social world' identified by Stebbins (2001, p. 7) repeatedly had resonance in the observations and conversations held with participants at the event. In fact, there were two special social worlds: in the participant's car/dance club, and at the event itself.

Social interaction

The observations of Unruh (1979) were highly relevant and observable at Wintersun, where there was an immediately 'internally recognisable constellation of actors, organisations and events and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants' (1979, p. 115). The constellation of car enthusiasts, car and dance clubs, cruises, displays and dances all contributed to a social scene, which characterises the rock'n'roll scene in Australia. Some serious participants were known to each other from other events they had been to, or other car-related meetings. They were predominantly members of clubs, (although some noted their decisions to abstain) where they interacted together as well as with other clubs and at other car club events. As described by Bill, 'All the other clubs have what they call an invitation rally and they invite everyone … and we go to all 'cos we're so involved'. The activities of serious car enthusiasts are thereby coordinated by others in the car enthusiast world. Another participant stated, 'we go to lots of other events – a lot of things with the car club. We're off to Tasmania next year with 30 other Mustangs'. Car events are regular social activities that are a central force in their lives and to their 'understandings of who they are' (Kane & Zink, 2004). As one car enthusiast stated, 'we go to events that are connected to cars, 'cos that's our game'.

Attending the event with the club helped dancers develop both personally and socially, as summed up by this participant from the Gold Coast Rockers: 'I enjoy the friendship, dancing of course, music, working together, achieve goals, all that sort of stuff'. These comments reinforce the importance of the social context for serious participants especially in working together to progress, thereby achieving the social rewards of group accomplishment highlighted by Stebbins (1992).

In many ways this is different from the social connections noted in other event studies where social interaction is less for a specific recreational purpose and more for strengthening family connections (Kyle & Chick, 2002) and building community (Derrett, 2003).

Participants noted that the event offered an opportunity to socialise in different social networks and in more open ways than at home, as shown in this comment by Jane: 'You can talk to complete strangers and everyone is so friendly, and you do a lot more socialising down here than you do at home'.

Fixated consumer

The behaviours observed at the event were consistent with past research on fanatical consumers (Redden & Steiner, 2000) highlighting participants' tendencies to go to extreme lengths to search and find authentic examples of clothing, music and memorabilia. The importance of opportunities to consume at this event is recounted by Frank, who had travelled from interstate:

> When we go back home we do up our rooms and that, at our houses, with all the rock'n'roll gear and juke boxes and dance floors, we buy all the paraphernalia here to decorate them, the Marilyn Munroe pictures, the Elvis pictures and all that sort of stuff, then we've got one (room) for the cars.

Serious participants used a number of sources to seek out and purchase the items they needed to continue and enhance their pursuit. Although shopping is often an activity that satisfies personal needs, shoppers were observed to seek out their items in packs, mostly as a club activity. They sought authentic items of clothing, music and accessories to the era and style of their pursuit that are provided by niche retailers who sell products at market stalls. Authenticity was important to both groups in the study, but especially to dance enthusiasts. Two reasons were discovered for this. Firstly, for practical reasons, the right type of shoes and skirts will allow certain types of dance moves that improve performance. Secondly, there is symbolic capital (Kane & Zink, 2004) in displaying/wearing the right types of shoes, skirts and jackets that highlight your seriousness towards the activity. The act of purchasing these items informs us of how participants create an identity that reflect their leisure lifestyle, as well as the importance of this activity as an overall part of the event. A dance enthusiast, Gail, described it as: 'a one stop shop for us; we get everything, we get the dancing, we get the clothes … we get everything, we probably shop for shoes down here more than any other time'. The event also was found to offer opportunities to buy, sell and trade classic cars (from pre-1974), which are worth between $1000 and $50,000.

Competition and reward

The event offered a range of opportunities to compete in both car and dance events aimed at varying levels of age and ability. As described by Stebbins (2001), competing offers an opportunity to overcome fear, embarrassment and failure and a chance to receive trophies and prizes that extrinsically rewarded their perseverance. The achievement of these rewards offered a turning point for a few participants, however the overall sentiment was that competing is not all about winning; as Reg stated, 'I'm not a trophy hunter'. There are other much more public rewards in entering the competitions which result in self-actualisation, self-enrichment and self-expression as described by Stebbins (2001). Appreciation of their efforts comes from crowds of up to 20,000 spectators, who watch the car parades and dance contests and provide immediate feelings of fulfilment. The rewards most appreciated by serious participants are in other serious

participants recognising the commitment they have made to authentically restoring cars, or authentic rock'n'roll dancing.

Skill development and exchange

Stebbins (1992) suggests that skill development is progressed through practice, instruction and determination. However in this study, skill development was observed to occur from social behaviour that involved interaction with others. For example, dance workshops are held for skill development, which involved group participation, learning from others as much as from an instructor. Conversations about the contests quickly turned to the value of contests for developing skills, showing that competition and skill development are closely linked.

Similarly, skill development would likely have occurred as a result of ideas exchanged between serious participants. As rocker dancer Betty suggested: 'The reason we came is for the exchange of ideas, we all do things a bit differently. We're the end of the line [in Cairns], where we miss a lot of this stuff. We're too remote from everything else'. Thus the rewards of travelling to an event like Wintersun are often in gaining and exchanging new ideas to implement back home.

Similarly, the reason to enter the car competitions is to view rare and authentic examples of classic cars, and to see how others have restored and detailed their cars, often called *rubbernecking or drooling*. As shown in Figure 4, the open event allows close inspection of engine details and conversations with owners to exchange information

Figure 4.   Car enthusiasts exchange ideas at the Show'n'shine. (Source: author).

about techniques. At times rubbernecking turns into networking, as details are exchanged for further discussions and technical advice after the event.

The inductive view from within the Wintersun event has highlighted the multifaceted experience that is occurring for serious participants travelling to and participating in the event. Nine domains of serious participant behaviour were identified under two categories of personal and social behaviours as specialised travel, lifestyle, identity reinforcement, pride, fanaticism, social interaction, fixated consumption, competition and skill development.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated the importance of travel to events as an integral part of achieving participants' leisure goals, and has identified three factors which facilitated this: (1) travel to the event allowed access to activities such as contests and workshops that were not available at home, thereby allowing development of new skills and knowledge; (2) travel to the event facilitated social interaction within a wider social world of participants who share the same ethos and values; and (3) travel outside the home community allowed celebration of leisure identity in an accepting and encouraging environment. While these facilitation factors relate well to the ideas of Green and Jones (2005), this study demonstrates the importance of the event as a motivator for serious participants to travel, and as an influence on touristic decisions such as destination and travel choice. Specifically, participation in this event allowed access to contests, social networks, workshops and parades, which further facilitated development of the six characteristics of serious leisure suggested by Stebbins (1992, 2001), as well as reflecting specialised travel as described by special interest researchers (Brotherton & Himmetoglu, 1997; Trauer, 2006; Weiler & Hall, 1992). Accordingly, the study reflects the mutually supporting roles of recreation and travel, and provides an example of how this concept might be further developed.

The ethnographic method of the study has assisted in exploring new dimensions to serious leisure behaviour and travel, as well as highlighting how and why Stebbins' six characteristics are facilitated at this one particular event. As such, nine domains were identified in the study as specialised travel, lifestyle, identity reinforcement, pride, fanaticism, social interaction, fixated consumption, competition and skill development.

Stebbins (1992) has referred to serious leisurists as somewhat misunderstood and marginalised. This study highlights participants' willingness to travel to find a community of interest where they are understood – in the contrived environment of an event, where streetscapes and cultural landscapes are altered to indulge the serious and sometimes fanatical interests of participants. In an event environment, the acceptance and celebration of participant's leisure identity allows them the freedom to feel normal, and to express and develop their skills. As such the study suggests that participation in an event is a turning point, or a catalyst for further skill development which stretches beyond the relaxed social gatherings and celebration highlighted in much of the event studies literature. Serious participants have sought to develop their leisure career, while simultaneously undertaking a touristic experience at this event (Iso-Ahola, 1983) among other like-minded visitors, which allows them to both seek new recreational opportunities and escaping their work and/or family life.

(Note: Participants names have been changed to ensure anonymity.)

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