

Costs, Constraints, and Perseverance

A Rejoinder to Lamont, Kennelly, and Moyle

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Abstract

Cost, constraints, and perseverance—three closely related terms in the serious leisure perspective (SLP)—have been identified by Lamont, Kennelly, and Moyle (2015) as in need of some clarification. This note attempts to clarify the relationship of the three, based on how they have been defined and interrelated over the years in the SLP. The concepts of constraint and cost play a number of different roles in the SLP. It therefore seems best to retain them as separate ideas, despite the doubts raised by Lamont and colleagues. Perseverance also plays a couple of roles in the SLP, which likewise justifies keeping the idea separate from cost and constraint, again contrary to the doubts posed by Lamont and colleagues.

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Lamont, Kennelly, and Moyle (2015) have identified a cluster of terms in the serious leisure perspective (SLP)—namely, cost, constraints, and perseverance—the relationship of which needs clarification. The goal of this rejoinder is to clarify these three concepts, based on how they have been defined and interrelated over the years in the SLP.

Leisure Costs

The richest discussion of the costs and rewards of serious leisure is presented in Stebbins (1992, Chap. 6). There I wrote that

there are rewards *and* costs in amateurism [which] suggest the profit hypothesis from the exchange framework as a more effective explanation of the leisure motives of amateurs than the one based on commonsense: “The greater the profit [excess of reward over cost] a person receives result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action’ (Homans, 1974, p. 31).

I went on in Chapter 6 to explore how occasional costs may be endured by amateurs (and I added later all participants in the serious pursuits [Stebbins, 2012]) as they engage in their pastime. In the end, however, “these costs are substantially offset by the rewards found therein” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 94). In other words, in the SLP costs—the three types explored were disappointments, dislikes, and tensions (pp. 100–107)—acquire meaning when viewed against a backdrop of rewards. Nine of these rewards were discussed in Chapter 6, with the 10th being identified during a study of volunteers (first reported in Stebbins, 1998, p. 26, though far more accessible in, for instance, Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 14).

I have never formally defined the idea of cost, being content instead to let the common-sense view of it prevail. The definition in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (2002) suffices: “3. Expenditure of time or labour; what is borne, lost, or suffered in accomplishing or gaining something.” It is evident here that in leisure a cost in this the sense of this dictionary is a *consequence* of participation, of pursuing a leisure activity. It therefore can be a constraint only in the sense that in anticipating a cost the participant foregoes participating. Examples include refusing to perform a solo on the violin because of possible stage fright (dislike) or to play a match in sport because of possible tense relations with the coach.

Leisure Constraints

Constraints, on the other hand, are *ipso facto* antecedent conditions. Thus Scott (2003, p. 75) defines leisure constraints as “factors that limit people’s participation in leisure activities, use of services, and satisfaction or enjoyment of current activities.” True, leisure participants, after a session in an activity, might decide that a certain condition is too much of a cost to justify further participation there. But here, too, this newly realized constraint now serves as an antecedent “limit” to further participation, use, and satisfaction or enjoyment.¹

In short, the ideas of constraint and cost play a number of different roles in the SLP. It therefore seems best to retain them as separate ideas, contrary to the doubts of Lamont and colleagues

¹These two sentences elaborate the following passage in Stebbins (2007/2015, p. 15): “The costs of leisure may also be seen as one type of leisure constraint. Costs certainly dilute the satisfaction or enjoyment participants experience in pursuing certain leisure activities, even if, in their interpretation of them, those participants find such costs, or constraints, overridden by the powerful rewards also found there.”

(2015, pp. 650, 651). Nonetheless, their concerns do point to an oft-neglected need to collect and analyse field data from these two conceptual angles.

I should add at this point that constraints also play another theoretic role that is rather different from the one just discussed in this section. Thus, I have argued in my book on the definition of leisure (Stebbins, 2012, p. 3) that leisure is not freely chosen, but is instead “uncoerced” activity, wherein people believe they are doing something they are not pushed to do, something they are not disagreeably obliged to do. In this definition, emphasis is necessarily on the acting individual and the play of human agency. This in no way denies that there may be things people want to do but cannot do because of any number of constraints on choice. That is, limiting social and personal conditions exist, examples of which include aptitude, ability, monetary expenses, socialized leisure tastes, knowledge of available activities, and accessibility of activities. In other words, when using this definition of leisure, with one central ingredient being lack of coercion, we must be sure to understand leisure activities in relation to their larger personal, structural, cultural, and historical background, their context (see especially Chapters 3 and 4). And it follows that leisure is not really freely chosen, as some observers once claimed (e.g., Parker, 1983, pp. 8–9; Kelly, 1990, p. 7), since choice of activity is significantly shaped by this background. We may say, however, that leisure is freely chosen *within the constraints* faced by the individual chooser.

Perseverance

I have also relied on the common-sense definition of perseverance to convey its meaning as one of the six qualities of the serious pursuits. In this vein, I have at times since 1992 portrayed perseverance as “conquering adversity” or “sticking with it through thick and thin.” This attitude is necessary because certain costs can dilute the positive experience of certain rewards. Stated otherwise, perseverance is needed to reach an acceptable level of fulfillment. Elkington and Stebbins (2014, p. 20) put it this way: “the goal of gaining fulfillment in serious leisure is the drive to experience the rewards of a given leisure activity, such that its costs are seen by the participant as more or less insignificant by comparison.” Perseverance lies at the heart of that drive.

Additionally, perseverance is a key orientation driving the effort to acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience needed to find fulfillment in a serious activity. This effort is another of the six qualities distinguishing the serious pursuits. Both of these meanings of perseverance justify retaining the idea as separate from cost and constraint, again contrary to the doubts posed by Lamont, et al. (2015, p. 251).

Conclusion

These authors also note that “in many of these studies [mentioned earlier in their article], costs are treated as a peripheral issue, and costs and perseverance in serious leisure are rarely explicitly connected, despite costs logically being the catalyst for a need to persevere” (p. 649). Notwithstanding the above-mentioned observation that the need to persevere is also part of the effort to acquire skills, knowledge, and experience, I agree with this quotation. I hope that their note and this rejoinder will encourage our colleagues to pay closer attention in their research and analysis to the cost-constraint-perseverance part of the SLP. The authors’ earlier study of triathletes is a fine model for how this can be accomplished (Lamont, et al. 2014).

Finally, in noting their recognition on page 652 that the SLP is not “above reproach” (my locution), I would like to underscore the importance of discussions of this kind. It is crucial to

remember that the perspective is a grounded theoretic construction, and that it therefore continues to grow (and change) from real life observations. The research note of Lamont et al. grew out of fieldwork wherein aspects of the SLP seemed not to fit the data. It is good that they wrote about their concerns.

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